

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	CP/6/25

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 22 May 2025

Report Title: Equalities Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report 2025

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of nine ‘protected characteristics’. Section 149 of the Act also places a ‘general’ Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) on bodies such as the Council to give ‘due regard’ in their work to:-

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

1.2 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 requires listed public bodies including Local Authorities, local Education Authorities and Licensing Boards to review and report on equality work. In 2025 we are required to publish:-

- progress made towards achieving the Council’s agreed equality outcomes for the period 2023-25;
- information on how equality is mainstreamed in the Council;
- annual employee information including the progress made in gathering and using the information to better meet the duties of the legislation;
- updated pay-gap information and Equal Pay Gap Statement; and
- a revised set of Equality Outcomes for 2025-2029

1.3 Key areas of progress in the Council's work to promote equality for the period 2023-2025 include:-

- The development and implementation of a new process for undertaking and embedding Integrated Impact Assessments on all decisions made within the organisation, including assessment of impact in relation to equality, poverty and children's rights;
- A continued reduction in the Council's Gender Pay Gap, from 4.5% (FY21/22) to 3.2% (FY23/24);
- The adoption of the British Sign Language (BSL) Plan for 2024-2030 and the formation of a new BSL Panel to give BSL users greater involvement and oversight of progress with the Plan's actions;
- A Children and Young People's Participation Strategy was agreed in 2024. Co-produced by young people and involving over 800 young people in its development, the strategy sets out the partnership's commitment to and route map towards a Highland in which the meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions which affect them is a reality;
- Improved outcomes for care experienced children through the 'Home to Highland' Programme which was developed to better support young people who would otherwise have been in placements out with Highland;
- Delivery of phase 1 of the project to improve the living standards of the gypsy traveller community;
- As part of the Equally Safe at Work pilot, all policies, procedures and support for employees experiencing violence against women and girls have been recently reviewed and passed external scrutiny;
- A Rights and Participation Website has been developed and provides the opportunity for children and young people to share their views to support service design. This supports the Children and Young Peoples Participation Strategy;
- Delivery of the GP Financial Inclusion Pathway and Welfare Advice & Health Partnership (WAHP). Starting in 2023, the programme is to provide access to money and welfare rights advice in primary care settings by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices;
- First Highland Trauma Summit took place in September 2024, organised by the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group. Trauma Champions are brought together from across Highland and agencies within the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group;
- Development of Highland's Promise Plan 2025-2028, built on the voices and experiences of care experienced young people and considered the diversity of care experienced children and family's needs, including, for example: age and stage of development, gender, disability, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and, importantly, the range of care 'placements' where children live and are looked after;
- In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a child friendly complaints process has been developed and implemented; and
- A mental health and wellbeing helpline was launched for employees in 2024 providing targeted support for staff through a range of routes

1.3 The report introduces and summarises the Council's Equality and Mainstreaming report for 2023-2025 which includes the proposed equality outcomes for the organisation for 2024-2029. The full report can be found at Appendix 2.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Consider** and **note** the Outcome and Mainstreaming Progress Report for the Highland Council covering the period 2023 – 2025 (and incorporating the Education Authority and Licensing Board) as detailed in Appendix 2; and
- ii. **Consider** and **agree** a revised set of Equality Outcomes for the Council for the period 2025 – 2029 as detailed in section 8 of the report.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - There are no new resource implications. The actions noted are taken forward within existing resources.
- 3.2 **Legal** - The Council, Education Authority and Licensing Board have a legal duty to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty; failure to comply has the potential to result in enforcement action, legal challenge or loss of reputation. The proposed Outcomes support these bodies in their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 3.3 **Risk** – The setting of key outcomes and ongoing monitoring of progress through reports such as this one, supports the Council in its compliance under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This report addresses the risk of non-compliance, as detailed in section 3.2 above. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is responsible for monitoring compliance with the Specific Duties and has established the practice of undertaking reviews of compliance with reporting requirements.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no specific Health and Safety risks arising from the report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from the report.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3. The mainstreaming and progress report is a performance report and therefore an impact assessment is not required. It describes how the Council's Equality Outcomes and general approach to equality, supports people to access Council services, prevents disadvantage and promotes equality of opportunity. This is for the Council as a service provider and as an employer.

- 4.4 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on the proposed Equality Outcomes for 2025-2029. The screening process has concluded that the proposed outcomes should have a positive impact. The outcomes are targeted at improving specific areas of experience – for staff, for people using our services, within schools and for specific groups – and are based on customer and user feedback and data. This includes improved experience of access to services, reducing poverty and inequality and improving our approach as an organisation on children’s rights, but also the experiences of specific groups including improving the lives and wellbeing of gypsy travellers, those identifying as neurodiverse and children and young people experiencing interrupted learning. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision making process.

4.5

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	Positive
Socio-economic	Positive
Human Rights	No Impact
Children’s Rights and Well-being	Positive
Island and Mainland Rural	No impact
Climate Change	No Impact
Data Rights	No Impact

5 Background

- 5.1 The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of nine ‘protected characteristics’:-

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

- 5.2 Section 149 of the Act also places a ‘general’ Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) on bodies such as the Council to give ‘due regard’ in their work to the need to:-

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

5.2 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 requires listed public bodies including Local Authorities, Local Education Authorities and Licensing Boards to publish information on equality work that contributes towards meeting the PSED. We are required to publish information on:-

- progress made towards achieving previous Equality Outcomes (2021-25) for the two-year period 2023-25;
- a revised set of Equality Outcomes (2025-2030);
- how equality is mainstreamed in the Council;
- annual employee information including the progress made in gathering and using the information to better meet the duties of the legislation;
- updated gender pay-gap information; and review the Council's Equal Pay Statement

The EHRC is responsible for monitoring compliance with the Specific Duties and has established the practice of undertaking reviews of compliance with reporting requirements.

5.4 The following provides a short summary of key points to assist in setting the context in Highland:-

- Highland's population is predicated to age over the next 20 years, with a 70% growth in people over 75 in the next 22 years. This will lead to challenges for providing care to enable people to stay at home
- Population decline is currently being experienced in communities across the Highland area, with further falls in younger and working aged populations predicted.
- 7,355 or 20% of children in Highland live in low income households, before housing costs and 66.2% of children living in poverty (before housing costs) live in a household with at least one adult working.
- According to the 2022 Census, 235,314 people lived in Highland; of these, 6,097 or 2.6 percent came from Black/minority ethnic backgrounds – this is a significant increase from 1.4% in the previous Census 2011.
- The 2022 census reported that 23.8% of the Highland community identified themselves as having a long-term health problem or disability - an increase on 18.6% on 2011. The Scottish Government's Labour Market Statistics (based on the Annual Population Survey) indicate an employment rate of 55.1% for disabled people in 2021, consistent with levels of 52.2% in 2015

5.5 Whilst the information and statistics outlined above come from external and partnership research, a number of these issues have also been reflected in the work of the Poverty Reduction Group, a partnership group chaired by Highland Council which sits beneath the Highland Community Planning Partnership and also through the community engagement that has been taking place and is continuing to be undertaken relating to the Council's Place Based approach and the ongoing work supporting the development of Place Plans across Highland.

6. Meeting the Reporting Requirements

6.1 The duties to prepare and publish information apply to the Council, the Education Authority and the Licencing Board as each are 'listed bodies' that the regulations apply to. As in previous years, our Equality Outcomes and reporting covers all three 'bodies' and identifies where activity is applicable to each.

6.2 **Section 1 Mainstreaming Equality** - The Council is required to report on the progress made to ensure that equality is considered as part of its day-to-day work. This means giving consideration to the three elements of the public sector equality duty in our functions as an employer, when planning and providing services and in decision-making. In doing so:-

- equality becomes part of our structures, behaviours and culture; and
- we can evidence how the Council promotes equality and builds it into our performance framework

6.3 Mainstreaming equality comprises section 1 of the Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes report and provides an overview of how the Council overall has met this duty during 2023-25. This includes case studies, and highlights areas of future activity. The report also includes a section on how equality is mainstreamed within Education and also the Licensing Board, given the specific named duties for these bodies. This section of the overall report also provides an update on the Council's progress against the BSL Plan.

6.4 **Section 2 Employment Information**

The Council is particularly aware of the duties under the Equality Act 2010 in terms of employment monitoring and is committed to meeting these. Section 2 of the report details information in relation to the Council's employees and statutory reporting duties in relation to the gender pay gap.

6.5 **Employee Information**

Information and analysis is provided in the report against all the protected characteristics. This is based on a new equalities monitoring form launched in 2024. Staff provide this on an anonymous basis and the categories align with those in the census. The new approach to monitoring has increased the number of employees submitting their data.

The Council currently holds data on 100% of the workforce in relation to age and sex (gender), 47% of the workforce in relation to disability and 43% in relation to race (ethnic group). The information recorded for the other protected characteristics has now vastly improved, however it is still limited in comparison. The data in this report shows that we currently hold 35% of the workforce data in relation to religion or belief and sexual orientation. 34% in relation to Transgender and Caring Responsibilities and 32% in relation to Marriage or Civil Partnership.

Key information shows:-

- Analysis of data relating to age distribution shows a high proportion of staff aged between 41 and 60 years of age and a low proportion of staff aged 30 and under. The gap is greater in the SJC workforce than teaching workforce;
- SJC staff under 30 are found predominantly in the Technical & Practical, Personal Care and Business Support job families and in the lower grades 1 to 5. The majority of staff who continue to work beyond 70 years of age do so in Technical & Practical jobs and in lower graded work;
- 10% of the total Council workforce identify as having a long-term health problem or being disabled. This equates to 20.2% of almost half of the Council workforce who completed an Equality Monitoring Form;
 - In comparison, in the 2022 census, 23.8% of the Highland community identified themselves as having a long-term health problem or disability. Based on the data disclosed, this suggests that our workforce largely reflects the wider Highland community;
- The representation of race (ethnic groups) employed by the Council largely reflects the wider Highland population as publicised in the 2022 census results;
- Analysis of the data relating to sex (gender) shows a predominantly female workforce across the whole of the Council (74.1%). This is the case for both the SJC and teaching workforce; and
- In 2025, 55.7% of the managers employed in SJC Management posts are women. This has steadily increased over the last 10 years.

6.6 **Pay Gap information**

The Council sets out its commitments to Equal Pay in an Equal Pay Statement. Since 2013, the Council has been required to publish information on its gender pay gap. This includes the percentage difference among its employees, between men's average hourly pay and women's hourly pay, and is one of the Council's Statutory performance indicators.

An organisation's gender pay gap is the difference between the average male and female pay rates. It is calculated by dividing the average female hourly pay rate by the average male hourly pay rate. The full-time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly pay rate of female employees who work full time and male employees who work full time. The part time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly pay rate of female employees who work part time and male employees who work full-time.

The Council is required to publish the gender pay gap between male and female employees. It is also required to publish this data separately on employees in Education (Teaching employees). The EHRC and *Close the Gap* also strongly advise publishing separate full time and part time gender pay gaps. It is considered that any pay gap of 5% or more is considered significant and in need of further analysis. Detailed analysis of the pay gap information can be found in **Appendix 2** section 2.2 of the report. A number of actions, outlined in the report, continue to be taken to address gender segregation, demonstrating a general improvement in the Highland Council's gender equal pay gap, notably the combined gender pay gap for all employees has reduced from 4.5% in 2023 to 3.2% in 2024.

2024	Combined Gap	Full Time Gap	Part Time Gap
All Employees	+3.2%	-17.4%	+18.9%
Non-Teaching Employees	+8.4%	-9.6%	+18.9%
Teaching Employees	+5.0%	+4.8%	+10.9%
SJC* Employees	+9.5%	-8.5%	+19.5%

**Scottish Joint Council (HC01 to HC15)*

Note: A positive figure denotes a gap to the advantage of male employees. A negative figure denotes a gap to the advantage of female employees.

6.6 **Section 3 Equality Outcomes**

Section 3 of the report focuses on the Council's Equalities Outcomes. This summarises progress against the outcomes for the last two years. In addition, the reporting duties require Council's to review their Equality outcomes every 4 years. This review is summarised in section 8 below.

7. **Key Progress 2023-25**

7.1 The following provides a summary of the key progress made towards promoting and improving equality across the Council over the last 2 years. The full progress report can be found in **Appendix 2**.

7.2 **Tacking discrimination and reducing barriers to services**

- A new Integrated Impact Assessment and Screening process has been developed and implemented providing a more efficient, effective a consistent approach to impact assessment and ensuring that all decisions taken within the Council are giving due regard to the needs to individuals and groups.
- The My Council programme is aiming to improve how all customers can contact the Council. This project aims to put the citizen at the centre of customer engagement, to improve our process and approach to all contact methods (digital, telephony, face to face) and provide a seamless customer experience, accessible to all.
- Delivery of phase 1 of the project to improve the living standards of the gypsy traveller community. The design of the homes, and wider estate, was informed by the residents' needs and aspirations. The design includes culturally relevant features. Tenancy rights, services and standards are consistent with Highland's other secure tenants.
- Improved outcomes for care experienced children through the 'Home to Highland' Programme which was developed to better support young people who would otherwise have been in placements out with Highland.
- Delivery of the GP Financial Inclusion Pathway and Welfare Advice & Health Partnership (WAHP) between NHS Highland and the Highland Council. Starting in 2023, the programme is to provide access to money and welfare rights advice in primary care settings by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices.
- First Highland Trauma Summit took place in September 2024. Organised by the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery

- Group. Trauma Champions are brought together from across Highland and agencies within the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group
- In line with the UNCRC, a child friendly complaints process has been developed and implemented.

7.3 Inclusive approaches

- A new British Sign Language (BSL) plan (2024-2030) was agreed in September 2024. A joint Plan with NHS Highland, developed in consultation with the BSL community, it sets out a range of commitments and actions that aim to improve the accessibility and inclusion of BSL users in our services. A new commitment is the formation of a new BSL Panel to give BSL users greater involvement and oversight of progress with the Plan's actions.
- A Children and Young People's Participation Strategy was agreed in 2024. Co-produced by young people and involving over 800 young people in its development, the strategy sets out the partnership's commitment to and route map towards a Highland in which the meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions which affect them is a reality.
- A Rights and Participation Website has been developed and provides the opportunity for children and young people to share their views to support service design. This supports the Children and Young Peoples Participation Strategy.
- Development of Highland's Promise Plan 2025-2028, built on the voices and experiences of care experienced young people and considered the diversity of care experienced children and family's needs, including, for example: age and stage of development, gender, disability, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and, importantly, the range of care 'placements' where children live and are looked after.

7.4 Employment and Occupational Segregation

- A continued reduction in the Council's Gender Pay Gap, from 5% (FY20/21) to 4.5% (FY21/22).
- As part of the Equally Safe at Work pilot, all policies, procedures and support for employees experiencing violence against women and girls have been recently reviewed and passed external scrutiny.
- A mental health and wellbeing helpline was launched for employees in 2024 providing targeted support for staff through a range of routes. This has provided easier access to help and support for staff. The helpline has been identified nationally as a model of good practice.

8. Proposed Equality Outcomes for 2025- 2029

- 8.1 Public bodies are required to publish a set of equality outcomes, report on progress every two years and review the outcomes every four years. Equality outcomes should set out our priorities for activity that will help to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations for relevant protected characteristic groups. They should focus on bringing about practical improvements in the life chances of those who experience discrimination and disadvantage, and that will help to tackle the most pressing inequalities in our society.
- 8.2 Public bodies should consider relevant equality evidence and take reasonable steps to involve equality groups. Evidence can include involvement of equality stakeholder as well as national research.
- 8.3 The proposed Outcomes for the period 2025 – 2029, are outlined below and detailed further in section 3 of **Appendix 2**. In the main, it is recommended that the existing outcomes are still relevant and represent significant areas of priority for the organisation. Whilst the outcomes remain, some of the priority activity areas have been updated to reflect areas of focus e.g. Prejudiced bullying in schools has been revised to focus on homophobic bullying based on the evidence and lived experience of young people.
- 8.4 The 2023 progress report proposed a new outcome at the time focused on delivering against the commitments of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is proposed to incorporate this into the overall suite of outcomes for 2025-2029 as embedding and delivering against this remains a priority.
- 8.5 At the November Committee, it was agreed that work would be undertaken through an officer and member working steering group, to develop a new outcome related to neurodiversity. In agreeing to this it was noted that the Council, as a service provider needs be aware of neurodiversity, and that some people do interact in different ways and that some people may need support to access services. As an employer, it is also important that Highland Council considers the needs of staff within the workplace.
- 8.6 A short life Officer Review Group was formed to consider and develop a draft neurodiversity outcome and this was supported by an informal Member Stakeholder Group. These groups met several times and developed the proposed neurodiversity outcome and associated actions that has been incorporated below.

8.7 The revised set of outcomes for 2025-29 and priority activity is summarised below:-

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2025 – 2029		Co-ordinating Service(s)
1.	A more diverse workforce that reflects our community <i>Priority Activity</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved data gathering and reporting to better understand our workforce Equality & Diversity profile Targeted positive action to address areas of underrepresentation, increase Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) awareness and enhance inclusivity, with particular focus on Neurodiversity and Gender Identity Improving employment prospects of resettled refugee families in Highland 	Corporate – HR
2.	Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making. <i>Priority Activity:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved engagement for people with protected characteristics to influence service planning, design and decision making Improved access to services and information about services for disabled people Improve the approach to inclusive communication and the information available about Council services for disabled people Improving the lives of Highland's Gypsy / Travellers 	Place - Communities
3.	In Highland, people from identified groups feel respected and equally safe from harm <i>Priority Activity</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence against Women & Girls Hate crimes and Hate incidents Reduce homophobic-based bullying in schools 	People – Health and Social and Education
4.	Work to reduce poverty and inequality for people across Highland <i>Priority Activity:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure household incomes are maximised and people are receiving all they are entitled to Work to reduce levels of child poverty across Highland Through the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission, consider, improve and accelerate our collective approach in Highland to tackling poverty and equalities. 	Place - Communities
5.	In Highland, people at risk of poorer mental health and wellbeing (from identified groups, including young people), will have improved access to the resources needed to support their mental health and wellbeing <i>Priority Activity:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to co-produced and integrated services and resources to ensure that people from identified groups in Highland benefit from good health and social wellbeing opportunities, accessing the right support at the right time through a whole system approach. Integrated Children's Services Plan – mental health & wellbeing 	People – Health and Social Care and Education

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2025 – 2029		Co-ordinating Service(s)
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6.	<p>Staff and pupils have an increasing understanding of equality and acceptance of diversity through embedded approaches based on the principles of the National Practice Model.</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality and children's rights and wellbeing 	People - Education
7.	<p>Increase the number of young people with protected characteristics leaving school moving into positive and sustained destinations</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing gender segregation and stereotyping within the curriculum 	People – Education
8.	<p>Reduce attainment and achievement gaps between pupils with protected characteristics and those living in poverty</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce attainment and achievement gaps for those with protected characteristics 	People - Education
9.	<p>We will meet the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning – reduce exclusions, improve the attainment of pupils looked after by the local authority, support for children from armed forces families</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of work for interrupted learners 	People - Education
10.	<p>Increase the Council's understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights-based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services.</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake awareness raising sessions with staff and members • Consider implications of services and develop relevant actions 	People – Education
11.	<p>Increase awareness of neurodiversity within our staff, councillors, and wider community, to develop knowledge, skills and understanding to better meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance, for inclusive communication based on Scottish Government's Accessible communication guidance and promote good practice • Develop inclusive communication training and evaluate impact • Develop a mandatory training package to increase awareness of neurodiversity • Review and update training for people working with children and young people who are neurodiverse • Pilot and promote neurodiversity awareness training modules to ensure impact by targeting a cross section of staff from all services • Offer access to neurodiversity training to community groups • Gather feedback on actions periodically from those with lived experience 	Corporate – HR

9. Conclusion and next Steps

- 9.1 Our Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2025 outlines the steps taken to mainstream equality into the work of the Council and proposes key outcomes for the next 4 years. We are aware that continuous improvement is needed to embed equality in our activities and decision making; and efforts to raise awareness with staff and members.
- 9.2 In addition to the outcomes and priority activities identified, key areas for development highlighted in the mainstreaming report include:-
- Delivering the My Council programme, with key actions including delivery of a new accessible website due in Autumn 2025.
 - Continuing use of the IIA system for all new policies and procedures going forwards is a key mechanism for mainstreaming equality.
 - Improving data gathering and reporting to better understand our workforce Equality & Diversity profile.
 - Re-establish Access Panels in all areas of Highland and establish a forum for sharing good practice and learning.
 - Deliver an Engagement and Involvement Strategy providing a framework to guide how we work together to maximise the benefits to our communities through effective participation and engagement reflecting the Scottish Government's vision "*... that people can be involved in the decisions that affect them, making Scotland a more inclusive, sustainable and successful place*"
- 9.3 Members are asked to note that the next monitoring report will be reported in April/May 2027. This will include an update on progress against the Council's Equality Outcomes, Employment Monitoring, Mainstreaming and also on the Council's BSL Plan.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 2 May 2025

Author: Alison Clark, Chief Officer Housing and Communities
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Carole Butler, Equality and Inequalities Officer

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Report 2025

Integrated Impact Assessment Summary

An integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on the proposed Equality Outcomes for 2025-2029. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant manager review and approval.

Equality, Poverty & Human Rights – These proposals are aimed at mainstreaming equality, in all that we do and the way we work across all services and deliver services to the public. They will therefore have a positive impact in relation to equality and poverty. There are outcomes which will support each of the protected groups, e.g. to achieve a more diverse workforce, to ensure identified groups feel respected and are equally safe from harm. There is also an outcome specifically aimed at reducing poverty.

Children's Rights and Wellbeing -There are specific outcomes aimed at meeting the needs of vulnerable children and also an action to increase the understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights-based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services. Actions aimed at the reduction of poverty and at mitigating its affect will also support children in or at risk of poverty. The proposals therefore will have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people, particularly our most vulnerable.

There are no Data Protection, Island & Mainland Rural Community or Climate Change Impacts.



THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL



May 2025

Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Report 2025

This is the Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Report 2025 on behalf of the Highland Council, Highland Education Authority and Highland Licensing Board. It demonstrates our continuing progress to advance equality and shows how we build equality into our work through activities and case studies and presents our Equality Outcomes for 2025-2029.

Highland Council Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2025

[Introduction and Summary of Progress](#)

[Legal and Local Context](#)

[Section 1 Mainstreaming Equality: 2023-2025](#)

[1.1 Leadership and decision making](#)

[1.2 Building equality into our work \(services and information\)](#)

[1.3 Engaging and involving communities](#)

[1.4 Awareness raising and promotion](#)

[1.5 Partnership Working](#)

[1.6 Education & Learning](#)

[1.7 Licensing Board](#)

[Section 2 Employment Information](#)

[2.1 Employment information](#)

[2.2 Pay Gap Information](#)

[2.3 Equal Pay Statement](#)

[Section 3 Equality Outcomes](#)

[3.1 Progress with outcomes 2023-2025](#)

[3.2 Review of outcomes 2025-2029](#)

Introduction

The Highland Council's Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2025 details progress on the equality work of Highland Council, Education Authority and Licensing Board for the period 2023-25, and presents a reviewed set of equality outcomes for the 2025-2029.

The Highland Council has made an ongoing commitment to address the three elements of the Public Sector Equality Duty to tackle discrimination, to advance equality and to foster good relations. The Highland Council's Programme recognises that Highland has an increasingly diverse population, and we welcome people of all faiths, nationalities and backgrounds who wish to live, study, work or visit here. It is one of our strategic goals to protect the vulnerable in our communities, promote fairness and welcome diversity. We aim to collaborate with our partners and with our communities to reduce inequality and tackle poverty and discrimination and embed equality and human rights across all areas of our work.

Summary of Progress

Progress on Mainstreaming Equality and on work towards achieving Equality Outcomes was last reported to Committee in May 2023, some key areas of progress since 2023 include:

- A new Integrated Impact Assessment and Screening process has been developed and implemented providing a more efficient, effective a consistent approach to impact assessment and ensuring that all decisions taken within the Council are giving due regard to the needs to individuals and groups.
- The My Council programme is aiming to improve how all customers can contact the Council. This project aims to put the citizen at the centre of customer engagement, to improve our process and approach to all contact methods (digital, telephony, face to face) and provide a seamless customer experience, accessible to all.
- Delivery of phase 1 of the project to improve the living standards of the gypsy traveller community. The design of the homes, and wider estate, was informed by the residents' needs and aspirations. The design includes culturally relevant features. Tenancy rights, services and standards are consistent with Highland's other secure tenants.
- Improved outcomes for care experienced children through the 'Home to Highland' Programme which was developed to better support young people who would otherwise have been in placements out with Highland.

- Delivery of the GP Financial Inclusion Pathway and Welfare Advice & Health Partnership (WAHP) between NHS Highland and the Highland Council. Starting in 2023, the programme is to provide access to money and welfare rights advice in primary care settings by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices.
- First Highland Trauma Summit took place in September 2024. Organised by the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group. Trauma Champions are brought together from across Highland and agencies within the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group
- In line with the UNCRC, a child friendly complaints process has been developed and implemented.
- A new British Sign Language (BSL) plan (2024-2030) was agreed in September 2024. A joint Plan with NHS Highland, developed in consultation with the BSL community, it sets out a range of commitments and actions that aim to improve the accessibility and inclusion of BSL users in our services. A new commitment is the formation of a new BSL Panel to give BSL users greater involvement and oversight of progress with the Plan's actions.
- A Children and Young People's Participation Strategy was agreed in 2024. Co-produced by young people and involving over 800 young people in its development, the strategy sets out the partnership's commitment to and route map towards a Highland in which the meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions which affect them is a reality.
- A Rights and Participation Website has been developed and provides the opportunity for children and young people to share their views to support service design. This supports the Children and Young Peoples Participation Strategy.
- Development of Highland's Promise Plan 2025-2028, built on the voices and experiences of care experienced young people and considered the diversity of care experienced children and family's needs, including, for example: age and stage of development, gender, disability, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and, importantly, the range of care 'placements' where children live and are looked after.
- A continued reduction in the Council's Gender Pay Gap, from 5% (FY20/21) to 4.5% (FY21/22).

- As part of the Equally Safe at Work pilot, all policies, procedures and support for employees experiencing violence against women and girls have been recently reviewed and passed external scrutiny.
- A mental health and wellbeing helpline was launched for employees in 2024 providing targeted support for staff through a range of routes. This has provided easier access to help and support for staff. The helpline has been identified nationally as a model of good practice.

Legal context and requirements

Public Sector Equality Duty:

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a new Public Sector Equality Duty (or 'General Duty') requiring public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

These requirements apply across the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The Scottish Specific Equality Duties:

The Scottish Government introduced the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations in 2012. The specific duties are intended to enable better performance of the general duty and apply to listed public bodies which include Local Authorities, Local Education Authorities and Licensing Boards. The specific duties include requirements to:

- Report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty.
- Publish equality outcomes and report progress.
- Assess and review policies and practices.
- Gather and use employee information.
- Publish gender pay gap information.
- Publish statements on equal pay.
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement.
- Publish in a manner that is accessible.

Fairer Scotland Duty: From April 2018 the Fairer Scotland (Socio-economic) Duty under Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010 came into force across Scotland, placing a legal responsibility on public bodies, 'pay due regard' to how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. Public bodies are also required to publish written assessments showing how they have fulfilled the duty. This aligns with pre-existing commitments in the Council to consider poverty and rural impacts.

UNHCR: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)) sets out the political economic, social, and cultural rights all children are entitled to and explains how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy their rights without facing discrimination

of any kind. Article 4 of the UNCRC requires governments ‘to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the UNCRC’. Children’s Rights & Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA) are one of the general measures of implementation under the Convention. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that all levels of government - national, regional, and local – should complete a CRWIA as part of their policy development.

Local context

Background:

Highland Council provides essential services in the largest geographical region in Scotland. Covering a third of the landmass of Scotland and with a population of over 236,330 people (mid-year estimates 2023), it is one of the largest employers in the area with approximately 11,000 staff.

Population

Highland is one of the least densely populated areas in Scotland and the UK with around 9 persons per square kilometre, and most population centres concentrated around the Inner Moray Firth basin and other coastal settlements. It faces a range of population challenges:

- Population decline is currently being experienced in communities across the Highland area, with further falls in younger and working aged populations predicted. There are particular challenges being faced in rural areas:
 - 65% of people in Highland live in remote rural, accessible rural areas or remote small towns
 - Over the next 22 years, a predicated fall of 15% in young people aged 0-15 across Highland - 31% fall Caithness, 30% fall Wester Ross, 24% fall Sutherland, 22% fall Easter Ross.
 - A 9% fall predicted in working aged population across Highland over the next 22 years – 30% fall in Sutherland, 27% fall in Caithness, 20% fall in Ross & Cromarty and Wester Ross.
- Highland’s population is predicated to age over the next 20 years, with a 70% growth in people over 75 in the next 22 years. This will lead to challenges for providing care to enable people to stay at home

Poverty

7,355 or 20% of children in Highland live in low income households, before housing costs and 66.2% of children living in poverty (before housing costs) live in a household with at least one adult working.

22,916 people are classed as income deprived as per the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation – 76% live outwith the 20% most deprived datazones

11,061 working age people in Highland are classed as employment deprived (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020)

Ethnicity

According to the 2022 Census, 235,314 people lived in Highland; of these, 6,097 or 2.6 percent came from Black/minority ethnic backgrounds – this is a significant increase from 1.4% in the previous Census 2011. In Scotland, 7.1 percent of the population identified as having a Black/minority ethnic background – compared to 4% in 2011.

White minority ethnic groups, such as those with white Irish and Polish, have also grown significantly since the last census, with 5.4 percent of the Highland's current population coming from a white minority background compared to 4.1 percent in 2011.

Disability/Long term health conditions

In the 2022 census, 23.8% of the Highland community identified themselves as having a long-term health problem or disability - an increase on 18.6% on 2011. The Scottish Government's Labour Market Statistics (based on the Annual Population Survey) indicate an employment rate of 55.1% for disabled people in 2021, consistent with levels of 52.2% in 2015.¹

¹ While equivalent statistics available for 2022 indicate an employment rate of 35.5% , the 2021 statistic has been used, as ONS notes that these due to a small sample size for Highland, the 2022 figure should be regarded with caution, as it may not be reliable (and would represent an unlikely drop of approximately 20% in employment of disabled residents during the preceding year): <https://www.gov.scot/publications/labour-market-statistics-for-scotland-by-disability-january-to-december-2022/pages/overview/>

Section 1 Mainstreaming Equality 2023 – 2025

Mainstreaming simply means integrating equality into the day-to-day work of the Council - taking equality into account in everything we do as an employer, when planning or providing services, and when making decisions. The Council, Education Authority and Licensing Board must report on how equality is mainstreamed into their work at intervals of not more than two years.

Mainstreaming equality is an organisational responsibility, requiring leadership and awareness to both promote equality and challenge unfair practices and prejudice. It can be demonstrated through taking account of equality in all our work. In doing so:

- Equality becomes part of our structures, behaviours, and culture; and
- We know and can demonstrate how the Council promotes equality and builds it into continuous improvement and better performance.

Previous Mainstreaming Equality reports:

[Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Reports | Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023](#)

[Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Reports | Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Report 2021](#)

1.1 Leadership and decision making

Leadership

Building equality into the work of the organisation can be seen in both the Council's Programme for Administration, Performance Plan, and the Council's Delivery plan.

Our Future Highland –

The Council's Programme for Administration (Our Future Highland) recognises the many strengths of Highland, such as its unparalleled natural environment; low crime; vibrant communities and strong local identities as well as many positive public, community, and voluntary sector partnerships. However, it also acknowledges, and aims to deliver improvements, on the issues around the cost of living which impacts on people, businesses, public services and the third sector across the Highlands. The Programme recognises the need for sustainable and resilient communities, businesses and council and recognises the need for affordable housing, cleaner environments, access to transport and work and a good quality of life.

Performance Plan

The Performance Plan provides the framework to deliver and monitor the Council's Programme. Progress is reported annually to Council.

Delivery Plan

The Council's Delivery Plan 2024-27 sets out how the Council will deliver against the Council's Programme and Budget Strategy and consists of 64 projects/programmes, managed through 6 Portfolio Boards. Key elements within the delivery plan support greater inclusion and experiences for people in Highland and demonstrate how the Council is mainstreaming equality into its work. Projects include:

- Delivery of greater affordable and accessible housing
- Delivery of the Home to Highland programme supporting improved outcomes for care experienced young people.
- Shifting the balance of care to support older people remain within their own homes and communities.
- Increasing more effective childcare solutions for families across Highland
- Tackling inequalities through the improved provision of supported employment
- Delivery of the Highland Investment Plan, including a new network of points of delivery which will bring together and provide an integrated model of service provision within local communities.

Highland Outcome Improvement Plan

The Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP), which includes Highland Council as one of its statutory public sector partners, is taking a leadership role in

mainstreaming equality through the 2024-2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and the Delivery Plan which sits alongside this.

This revised plan was published in June 2024 following an extensive review and engagement process involving public and third sector partners. The plan encourages integration of equality into the day-to-day work of the Council and the other partners by focusing on strategic priorities that enable individuals to live independently, develop sustainable communities, and create economic opportunities.

Under the People strategic priority, the Community Planning Partnership partners, including Highland Council, are dedicated to improving outcomes for individuals across the Highland area focussing on tackling inequality. Key outcomes include:

- improved access to services through co-produced and integrated processes,
- enhanced health and social wellbeing opportunities, and
- a comprehensive whole-system approach to support individuals.

The 2024 – 2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan emphasises active community engagement, ensuring that the voices of all members, including young people, shape its actions regionally and locally with the ambition to engage seldom heard voices more actively at a local level going forward. By integrating services and support, the CPP aims to maximise resources and reduce duplication, developing solutions tailored to local needs.

Additionally, the 2024 – 2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan supports community development, community wealth building, and targeted assistance for vulnerable groups, promoting inclusivity. Through involvement and commitment to the CPP and the revised Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, the Council demonstrates its commitment to promoting equality and building it into continuous improvement and better performance, thereby tackling inequalities and fostering thriving communities across the Highland area.

Decision Making

Governance and scrutiny of how the Council meets the Public Sector Duty requirements is primarily through the Communities and Place Committee. Relevant matters would also be brought to other committees, for example:

- [Corporate Resources Committee](#) – staffing and welfare reform
- [Economy and Infrastructure Committee](#) – employability, community wealth building
- [Education Committee](#) – Additional Support Needs (ASN), attainment, bullying
- [Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee](#) – social care (disability, age), Mental Health, Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- [Housing and Property Committee](#) – Gypsy/Travellers, Refugee Resettlement, access to affordable rented and accessible rented housing.

The Council's Corporate Management Team, led by the Chief Executive, has collective responsibility to ensure that the authority delivers against its equality duties.

A cross-service officer group, the Fairer Highland group, oversees and monitors equality work across the Council. The remit of the group includes poverty reduction/socioeconomic work.

Performance Indicators

The Accounts Commission issues a Direction for Councils to follow in respect of the collection and reporting of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs). A range of information is reported in respect of SPI 1: Improving local services and local outcomes, and SPI 2: Demonstrating Best Value. For SPI 1, the Council is also expected report upon its performance over time, and in comparison, with other similar bodies. This comparison includes using the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) which provides data for all 32 Scottish Councils. The Council uses a number of LGBF indicators to benchmark its performance within its Performance Plan.

There are two Corporate Services SPIs directly relevant to equality:

- gender balance in more senior Council posts
- gender pay gap for staff in the Council.

Women in the top 5% of earners:

Women in top 5% of earners in the Council	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Highland Council	57.1	54.4	52	57	51.4%
Scottish Average	52.8	51.5	51.1	50.7	48.5%
Highland Council Rank	21	25	28	15	23

This indicator is part of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework and as such is included in The Highland Council's reports on Statutory Performance Indicators. More details on our SPIs are available on the [performance section of our webpages](#).

Gender Pay Gap:

Gender Pay Gap	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Highland Council	3.2	4.5	4.5	5.0	5.8
Scottish Average	2.0	2.5	3.5	3.7	3.4

Highland Council Rank	18	24	21	23	24
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This indicator is part of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework and as such is included in The Highland Council's reports on Statutory Performance Indicators. The Council also produces Gender Pay reports every two years with the latest for 2024 included in this report at section 2.

The Council has a range of formal performance reporting mechanisms which refer to progress on equality, including:

- [Council's Annual Corporate Performance Report](#)
- [Council and Committee Reports](#)
- [Local Government Benchmarking Reporting \(SPIs\)](#)

Annual Corporate Performance Report 2023/24:

The Council's Corporate Performance Report ([Highland Council | The Highland Council](#)) identifies progress to achieve several relevant outcomes including:

- Processing times for housing benefit and council tax reduction which continue to show year on year improvement with performance amongst the very top performers in not only in Scotland but in the UK. Prompt processing of benefit claims provides valuable financial assistance to those struggling during the current cost of living crisis.
- Increasing numbers of newly enrolled and upskilled staff through modern apprentices.
- There has been significant improvement in the reduction of the average number of children and young people accommodated out with Highland. Evidence shows that better outcomes are achieved where we manage to keep our children and young people in Highland.
- A total of twenty-eight community transport projects were supported during the year.
- The number of council houses built or purchased, and the number of affordable houses built by others have both significantly exceeded the targets. The overall total is 418 houses compared to a target of 300, a 40% increase above the target.

1.2 Building equality into our work (services and information)

The Council delivers a wide range of services and functions across the largest local authority in Britain in terms of geography, much of which is largely rural. The population of Highland has been rising steadily in recent decades, and we have an ageing population which brings with it the likelihood of an increasing prevalence of age-related disability. Highland does not have as diverse a population as Scotland as a whole, with a relatively small minority ethnic population.

The following section provides just some of the examples of how equality is built into the work of the Council.

Assessing for Impact

A new Integrated Impact Assessment and Screening (IIA) process has been developed and implemented. Agreed in June 2024, the new approach reflects changes in legislation and requires an Impact Assessment to be undertaken as part of the development of any new or revised policy or practice and any strategic decisions relating to the delivery of Council services. The development of this new tool ensures that the Highland Council has a more effective, efficient, and consistent approach that delivers on the duties we have.

The impact assessment process informs our decision making and The Highland Council has adopted a new committee report format in which the findings of impact assessments require to be set out. This integrated Impact Assessment process requires consideration to be given to the potential impact in relation to equality, poverty, and children's rights as well as the any impacts relating to data protection, climate change, island, and mainland rural communities. To support the implementation of this key tool, training and guidance for staff was developed and rolled out prior to the introduction of the tool, along with online training sessions during the early months of implementation.

The new Integrated Impact Assessment tool went live in July 2024 and by 31st March 2025, 189 Integrated Impact Assessment screenings had been opened. Of these 158 have been closed and 31 remain currently open. Of the closed cases, 2 were withdrawn, 146 were closed after the screening stage and 10 required a full Impact Assessment.

Improving monitoring and understanding equalities information

The Highland Housing Register application gives applicants the opportunity to provide equalities data, and this data is reported as part of the annual Highland Housing Register Monitoring Report. Equality data is also collected when tenants register for Housing Online. Housing will investigate the options and opportunities to capture more equality data for our tenants and applicants.

A full Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out for the Highland Housing Register policy changes and screening assessments were carried out for the Tenant

Participation Strategy, Housing Support Framework Agreement, Damp and Mould guidance and Longman Park Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement.

Case study – Community Regeneration Fund

Community Regeneration Funding (CRF) is an umbrella term that covers several national funding streams that are administered by the Community Regeneration Funding Team within Highland Council. External third sector and voluntary organisations make applications for funding to deliver projects that meet area specific objectives.

As part of the application process, every project is required to demonstrate how they have considered equalities issues/impacts, particularly in relation to groups with protected characteristics. All organisations applying for funding must also evidence that they are compliant with Fair Work First legislation.

The CRF team provide guidance and support to applicants through this process, including best practice guidelines, for example on how to present written materials. Decision making on which projects receive funding sits with several different groups, including Area Committees and the Strategic Local Action Group. In the case of the Strategic Local Action Group, in establishing the membership of the group a key consideration was representation from equalities perspectives and ensuring balance for example in terms of gender.

Prior to being awarded funding, all projects are subject to a technical assessment by the CRF team. Part of this assessment includes a RAG (red/amber/green) rating for several key criteria, one of which is equalities. The team also look for applicant organisations to have key policies in place including an equal opportunities policy or similar. Where an applicant group does not have this in place then it would be a recommendation or condition of any funding awarded that one is developed.

Over the last 3 years CRF has funded over five hundred community led projects including improvements to community facilities, energy efficiency improvements, tourism infrastructure and several services specifically targeting children, young carers, or people with mental health issues.

Improving access to information and services

The work of the My Council Project began in 2023 with the purpose of creating an improved and joined-up customer contact experience at the Highland Council. This includes the opportunities to further utilise digital approaches to support improved outcome for our citizens, our staff, and the Council. This project aims to put the citizen at the centre of customer engagement at the Highland Council, to improve our process and approach to all contact methods (digital, telephony, face to face) and provide a seamless customer experience, accessible to all. Digitally, the design of

the new website must meet accessibility legislation (The Public Sector Bodies Website & mobile Applications No.2, 2018.), and all design ideas presented have gone through accessibility checks.

Our waste collection services have arrangements in place to directly support services through adjustments to the service, for example by providing an additional bin to meet the needs of larger families or household where a medical condition creates additional waste. Assisted backdoor collection can also be provided where a householder's disability or long-term condition makes it difficult for a bin to be presented for collection in the normal way at the kerbside. This is particularly helpful to older residents and those living with long-term physical or mental disabilities.

Case study – BSL panel

The 2024-2030 BSL plan, which is a joint Plan shared with NHS Highland as many of the actions and commitments are shared ones, was approved at the Communities & Place Committee in September 2024. The plan itself was developed in consultation with the BSL community, who were able to input via two face to face meetings which provided an opportunity for the Deaf community to feed back around the current issues and the challenges experienced by the Deaf community. The plan sets out a range of commitments and actions that aim to improve the accessibility and inclusion of BSL users in our services.

The Plan's actions, include:

- joint actions around promoting awareness of Contact Scotland BSL and increasing staff awareness of their responsibility to use BSL interpreters and how to access them.
- a commitment to improve the BSL content on our website and work and work around capturing communication needs at the first point of contact.
- a number of actions and commitments around young people, including ensuring access to communication support for pupils to enable them to access formal meetings in school if they wish to, such as Child's Plan meeting, and a continuing commitment to provide support to families with a deaf or deaf/blind child through the Highland Deaf Education Service.
- Section 3 of the Action Plan focuses on access to employment, such as an action to create sustainable pathways to support BSL users to transition to positive and sustainable destinations post school.
- a range of commitments and actions around access to services – for examples, actions around transport and awareness raising for providers as well as a commitment to develop a BSL user friendly complaints process.
- One action was to set up a new BSL panel to provide the opportunity for regular dialogue and engagement with BSL users. To set this panel up all the BSL users who have accessed BSL support via the Service centre were messaged regarding the panel and volunteers sought. Four panel meetings per year are planned, and these will be a mix of online and face to face. The first panel met in January online. The meeting was supported by 2 BSL interpreters and the BSL users attending were able to give their feedback

on the way they access services. The commitment to 4 meetings per year will embed ongoing dialogue and enable the panel to track the actions and commitments in the Plan. The next Panel meeting is due in early June and will be face to face, in Inverness.

Supporting vulnerable groups

The Council is committed to providing specific support to a range of groups where there are particular needs or service requirements under the Health and Social Care Service, children's disability services, violence against women and girls (VAWG), people with experience of care, commissioning of adult services.

The Council has recently committed to ensuring improved outcomes for the Highland's care experienced children, young people and care leavers in line with the findings of the Independent Care Review and an assessment of where the Council is positioned in terms of the work that needs to be done to achieve the aspirations of [The Promise](#). Highland Council is also part of the Corporate Parenting Board, known as the Promise Board, with local Partner agencies and a joint Corporate Parenting Board Improvement Plan is being developed.

[The Promise - Highland Community Planning Partnership](#)

Case Study - The Highland Promise Plan 2025-2028

Developing the Highland Promise Plan considered the diversity of care experienced children and family's needs, including, for example: age and stage of development, gender, disability, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and, importantly, the range of care 'placements' where children live and are looked after. Importantly for Highland, the geographical context e.g. urban and rural was also be considered.

Corporate parents must also work in partnership, pulling joint duties of collaboration and planning together. Like most extended families, the corporate family consists of many parts – local authorities as a whole; health services, both universal and specialist; independent and third sector; police, children's hearing system and all those broader parts of the system which support service delivery. These Are Our Bairns has a powerful lasting message for all corporate parents:

The Highland Promise Plan (HPP) is built on the voices and experiences of care experienced children and young people through a broad range of engagement and participation activities across Highland. The VOICE of children and young people form a significant part of the development of the draft plan through the findings from Highland's Children & Young People Participation Strategy (over 800+ young people) and reviews of Highland's residential care (Your Voice Matters, 15 YP). The views, feedback, data, and thematic analysis of all these collaborative activities have contributed to the production of the plan.

Work around the support of families has included the promotion of clothing grants through schools and social media channels. In 2023/24 (latest data available), 4822 pupils were entitled to clothing grants, an increase of 424 (+9.6%) from 2022/23. A shared form had been developed to jointly promote free school meals and clothing grant uptake. National negotiations are ongoing on data sharing to enable automatic awards of free school meals and ensure families do not have to apply when eligibility identified through other benefits.

Case Study - Improving the Lives of Highland's Gypsy Travellers - Better standards of accommodation.

Highland Council, with match funding from the Scottish Government is delivering "a great place to stay and bring up children" in Inverness. This is with the aim of improving health and well-being outcomes.

Last year, five families moved into their new affordable homes – built to high quality design and energy efficient standards. More homes, a Community Hub, and facilities for households whilst travelling, are currently being developed. The tenants are delighted with their homes. Some describing the transformation as 'life-changing' for them and their families.

The design of the homes, and wider estate, was informed by the residents' needs and aspirations. The design includes culturally relevant features. Tenancy rights, services and standards are consistent with Highland's other secure tenants. The development is one of 6 [national demonstrator projects](#). It is providing important lessons across for accommodation, improving standards and engaging with community members.

Mainstreaming investment - Ensuring our [sites](#) meet quality and safety standards continues to be a statutory requirement; planning investment and delivering improvements continues to be part of Property & Housing Service's mainstream activity. As material and trades prices are impacting on investment plans, we will continue to explore alternative options for funding which can deliver improvements alongside affordable rents.

Home to Highland is the strategic approach and service for care experienced children and young people (CECYP) with a key purpose of enabling them to remain living and learning in the Highland area. The vision of the Programme is to return care experienced young people to the Highlands from out of authority residential placements, whilst also developing services in Highland to prevent young people requiring to move out of authority. Home to Highland is a fundamental component of Children's Services Families 1st Strategy - to safely maintain children with their families in the Highlands.

Case Study – Home to Highland

The Home to Highland Programme was developed to return care experienced young people to the Highlands from out of authority residential placements, whilst also developing services in Highland to prevent young people having to move out of authority.

It followed on after a review of Out of Area (OOA) placements which found quality to be lacking and over time a reliance had built up around placing young people, particularly those requiring specialist support outwith Highland. This included, for example, young people requiring specialist support within mainstream school/home, children presenting with distress response behaviour within residential houses, and young people with an ASD diagnosis.

Having reviewed the outcomes the service was confident that care, education, and wellbeing could be improved, and work was conducted to assess which services currently out of Highland were financially viable to be replicated in-area, whilst meeting children's needs.

A key driver for change was the fact that it was known that children wished to remain in the communities they have grown up in and near their families, people, and places they know. It was also clear that budgets were increasing year on year and the Council wanted to ensure funding was being used more equitably for as many children as possible rather than a very large budget being spent on a comparatively small cohort of children. As a result of these key drivers the Home to Highland Programme (the Programme) was developed.

The Programme is now a fundamental component of the Council's Children's Services Families 1st Strategy. It has helped to improve educational achievement & attainment for Care Experienced Young People whilst also supporting a shift in the balance of spend from OOA to in-area. 72% of the £13M budget is currently spent on in-area services for Care Experienced Young People. This has enabled the development of the over £8 million per year of in-area services, which help stop children going OOA and serve as places for children to return to. Twenty-five new services have been developed in Highland. These equate to over fifty beds for children in Highland that did not exist before the Home to Highland Programme.

The services developed include:

- 6 small, specialist residential houses
- 2 contracts providing fifteen beds in three residential houses.
- 4 supported core and cluster flats for 17–26-year-olds
- 8 supported move-through flats for 17–26-year-olds
- 6 modular one-bed flats for youngsters leaving care.

- Crisis care centre with six beds based on No Wrong Door Model
- Additional CAMHS Service from the NHS to work with CEYP
- 3 bespoke education bases for children with complex needs

Achievements of the programme include:

- 101 children have returned to Highland or moved on to semi-independence,
- Majority of young people healthier, happier, achieving more
- £15 million in avoided costs,
- Shift in spend from 100% OOA, to 72% in Highland,
- £8M of bespoke services developed in-area,
- Human cost always balanced with financial cost of care,

An evaluation of Programme found:

- Children, their families, their Social Workers, teachers, residential staff, and Placement Officer say they are happier and are enjoying and achieving in their education, hobbies, and lives.
- Violence and aggression forms are greatly reduced for a number of returned children.
- They are receiving bespoke education packages tailored to their needs, likes and abilities.
- Several have been found to be achieving more educationally than over several years OOA.
- Ultimately, they feel they are cared for and belong here.

The Council as an employer

The Council's People Strategy 2022-2027 includes key actions to improve equality, diversity, and inclusion as part of our recruitment and employment policies and practices. We aim to encourage a workplace culture of dignity, respect, and engagement, and to equip our staff with the skills and confidence needed to deliver on equality, diversity and inclusion as an employer and service provider. Key equality activities relating to the Strategy are:

- *HR system update*
- *Improved employee equality monitoring*
- *Equality and diversity training updated and delivered*

Staff Wellbeing – Work has focused on understanding and improving staff wellbeing in the workplace. A Wellbeing Survey of staff in the Highland Council was conducted between December 2023 and January 2024. The survey was completed by 1614 staff, making up 15% of the workforce.

As our most valuable asset, staff and their wellbeing is crucially important to Highland Council. Incorporating staff views expressed from this survey into future planning and reviewing strategies to support our workforce is of critical importance.

This survey demonstrates The Highland Council are getting wellbeing right in many areas but also highlights opportunities for improvements and factors staff feel impact the effective management of mental health and wellbeing.

Demands and Control - 78% respondents said their colleagues always or often involve them and value their contribution. 92% said they are always or often considerate about the demands they put on colleagues before asking for support.

Relations and support - 76% of respondents said they always or often feel confident to approach others in their team if they felt they needed support. 61% said they always or often know where to seek support if they experience difficulties.

Role - 71% of respondents said they feel they are always, or often, treated fairly at work, and 71% said due to work relationship issues, they never or seldom feel uncomfortable whilst at work. 84% responded they always or often feel confident their skill sets are suitable to enable them to fulfil their role and 81% responded they always or often are clear what their role is and what is expected from them.

Some of the areas identified as what we can do better are already in hand, such as dealing with change and included in strategies and will address some of these issues. The Council's Wellbeing Strategy is currently being reviewed. These results will feed into this strategy to help drive improvement.

Other strands of work to improve mental health and wellbeing of staff includes:

- A Mental Health and Wellbeing hotline has been established. This is detailed in the case study below.
- The Skilled level suicide intervention course, "Safe For Now" designed by OHSW team, and delivered via Highland Community Planning Partnership, has been rolled out. Administration supplied by NHS staff using TURAS.
- The council's Mental Health and Wellbeing Representatives (MHWR) initiative is currently under review to reflect changes in working practices. We currently have 64 MHWR staff volunteers working across all areas of the council.
- A MH&WR dedicated e-mail has been introduced as an alternative route to support, in addition to the new MH&W helpline which provides a callback option from a MHWR.
- The Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub on Staff Connections has been revised and has received very positive feedback.
- The Mental Health and Wellbeing Viva Engage page is generating a lot of traffic and positive feedback.

Case Study: Supporting Head Teacher Wellbeing through the provision of Professional Reflective Supervision

Many professional groups who work with children and young people receive regular professional supervision to support their safe practice and create a space for reflection and growth. In local authority schools however, supervision is not provided as a matter of course to staff. Before the outbreak of Covid-19, protected time for reflection and support had been identified as a need from teacher unions and others who highlighted the need for teachers to share some of the stresses and anxieties they experience within a safe and confidential space. However, the need for this type of support has been further highlighted due to the increasing demands on school senior managers as a direct result of the global pandemic.

This type of supervision has been shown to offer beneficial outcomes to the individual, but also to the wider organisation and to service delivery. The offer of Professional Reflective Supervision has therefore been provided in Highland by the Educational Psychology team as a means of supporting HT wellbeing.

Head teachers are offered six supervision sessions of 1 hour, no more than 1 month apart. These are provided on-line but could be delivered face-to-face if required. At the end of six sessions, consideration can be given to provide a further 6 sessions, or to end the contract at that point. Continuation is contingent on the needs of the supervisee and the capacity of the service. HTs can request a further six sessions at any time.

Evaluation is undertaken using the Manchester Clinical Supervision Scale (Winstanley, 2000), which asks a range of questions about:

- The importance and value of supervision
- Finding time for supervision
- Trust and rapport with the supervisor
- The effectiveness of the supervisor's advice and support
- Improves care and skills as a result of supervision
- Effectiveness of reflection during supervision

25% of HTs have accessed this support to date. All scores thus far have demonstrated 'effective' practice as measured by the Manchester Scale, with the exception of supervisees finding time to give to this process in their busy days. This indicates one of the main barriers to seeking support – that HTs prioritise the support of others, rather than their own support and development.

Case Study: Mental Health and Wellbeing Helpline

Wellbeing Case Study from Highland Council
Implementation of new helpline for staff

Overview

We introduced a new Mental Health Helpline for employees, where by using a local Highland area code we hoped to reduce the anxiety and stigma around asking for help.

The four options on our helpline are:

1. Employee Assistance Programme
2. NHS 24
3. Samaritans
4. Request a call back from a Mental Health and Wellbeing Representative

Challenges

Initially we wanted to use a QR code but this was not feasible due to GDPR. As very technical we sought and received support from our ICT Team.

Want to know more information?

Jim McCreath - Health Safety and Wellbeing Co-ordinator - James.mccreath@highland.gov.uk

Benefits

For staff – Provides easier access to help and support for staff.

For organisation: Staff feel supported and valued by the organisation.

Any tips for those setting up a similar project

Be nice to your ICT team!

Short quote(s) from people involved about the benefits of your project

"I'd never used a helpline before, too scared. The Dingwall number made it seem less scary."

Case study – Sexual Harassment Preventative Duty

As of 26th October 2024, employers have a legal duty to take proactive reasonable steps to prevent Sexual Harassment.

Highland Council's [Sexual Harassment Policy](#) has been updated to reflect the legislative changes including addition of staff and manager responsibilities in relation to preventing sexual harassment e.g. carrying out appropriate risk assessments, considering the nature of the employee role and the work environment, and dealing quickly and sensitively with any disclosure or formal reports of sexual harassment.

The preventative duty also applies to where sexual harassment is perpetrated by a third party. A new harassment form is being developed on the Assure (H&S reporting) system which will enable monitoring and reporting of any cases of third-party sexual harassment going forward (currently staff are asked to call an internal helpline). We are also looking to work with Procurement to include an equalities statement within contracts outlining the council's zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment.

Managers are required to complete a new mandatory sexual harassment training module which includes their responsibilities in relation to preventing sexual harassment in the workplace.

The council continues to develop its team of Bullying & Harassment advisors who can provide important initial support to staff who have been affected by bullying and (any form) of harassment, and will listen, reassure, and signpost appropriate support services.

Building Equality into our Work - key actions going forward

- Work on the My Council project is proceeding with key actions including delivery of a new accessible website due in Autumn 2025.
- Continuing use of the IIA system for all new policies and procedures going forwards is a key mechanism for mainstreaming equality.
- Improve data gathering and reporting to better understand our workforce Equality & Diversity profile

1.3 Engaging and involving communities

The Council, Education Authority, and Licensing Board ordinarily use a wide range of methods to engage with communities in Highland. This includes surveys, formal and informal consultation with groups, consultations with elected members, a Licensing Forum, Community Councils, Local Community Partnerships, pupil and parent engagement in schools, tenant engagement, and our day-to-day contact with customers. Social media and other forms of digital data gathering are being increasingly used and explored, providing practical alternatives given the geography of Highland.

The Council maintains a database of contacts for a wide range of local groups with an interest in equality and diversity, providing a valuable network of contacts to ask for views on equality related issues. There is continual engagement with the groups on the equality contacts database, with email alerts regularly sent by the Council containing updates on local events, consultations, and funding opportunities, some examples of recent engagement follow:

Gypsy Traveller Engagement

Several residents involved in the Inverness development formed a group. They continue to come together to explore shared issues; build 'community capacity' and resilience. Recent successes include feeding into plans for their new play area design and facilities.

Members of Highland's Gypsy Traveller community produced a newsletter aimed at engaging others across Highland on issues of importance to the community. Highland's Tenant Participation team has been supporting community members to build opportunities, and capacity, to engage around issues of interest to them, supporting communication and helping to build constructive relationships and understanding between services and the community.

Council Tenants

Council tenants are encouraged to engage with us on issues that affect their tenancy and local area, giving their views and lived experience to help shape the housing service. By attending the tenant forum, held every 2 months or more local area meetings and drop ins tenants can provide input to make a positive impact in their estates.

This year has seen the return of estate walkabouts inviting tenants, officers, and members to visit certain estates, creating an action plan for issues that need to be addressed, such as path repairs, maintenance of communal spaces and fly tipping. Being proactive and visible to tenants is helping to build positive relationships and to reach tenants less likely to engage in more formal methods.

We understand that tenants would like to receive information in a way that suits their needs, in 2024 following consultation with tenant we switched to distributing our newsletter digitally by default. We also ensure that tenants can request to receive a physical copy by post should that be their preference. We also seek input for our tenant communication group to make the newsletter as accessible as possible, increasing font sizes and looking at colour contrasts. We are currently looking at how we can make the PDF file more user-friendly.

BSL Panel

The 2024-2030 BSL plan, a joint Plan shared with NHS Highland, was approved at the Communities & Place Committee in September 2024. The plan was developed in consultation with the BSL community, who inputted its development and provided feedback on current issues via two face to face meetings. The plan sets out a range of commitments and actions that aim to improve the accessibility and inclusion of BSL users in our services.

Infrastructure and Environment – Building Standards and Access Panels

There are currently five active Access Panels, covering Badenoch & Strathspey, Caithness, Inverness, Lochaber, and Nairn. There has been some recent interest in Ross & Cromarty from a number of individuals and it is hoped that this access panel may be reformed in the near future. There are no Access Panels at present in Skye or Sutherland, despite promotion via social media. Efforts to support formation of new panels in these areas will continue.

The Council's Building Standards Service has regular engagement with the local Access Panels across Highland. The service notifies the Local Access Panels/Groups of the weekly list of building warrant applications received via a link to the Building Standards Register. This allows the Access Panel to contact via virtual.sbsteam@highland.gov.uk requesting to be consulted on a particular building warrant application.

The Principal Building Standards Surveyor in each of the seven localities is available to attend Access Panel meetings and to provide advice and guidance on the Technical Standards to the building regulations.

Place Planning

Recent activity has taken place across several Council areas to develop Area Place Plans which will form the basis for delivery of place-based services by Council services, statutory partners and the third sector. Engagement methods have included face to face meetings; on-line questionnaires; hard copy questionnaires; drop-in sessions in libraries and community facilities and specific sessions with groups such as young people etc. In addition, single events were used to encapsulate engagement and consultation on multiple plans and proposals, thus

avoiding consultation fatigue, highlighting plan linkages, and reducing costs of hall rentals and officer time. Efforts have also been made to ensure what might be termed the 'quieter voices' are heard by conducting focussed interviews with the chairs of key local groups, such as the Access Panel and the Poverty Reduction Group. Locations for key drop in consultation events were also selected considering their location and range of users to ensure a range of voices were heard.

Children and Young Person's Participation Strategy

A Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2024 – 2029 has been developed and sets out the partnership's commitment to and route map towards a Highland in which the meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions which affect them is a reality.

<https://www.childrensrighthighland.co.uk/children-young-peoples-participation-strategy>

The strategy was developed by a cross-partnership steering group – which included young people – between March 2023 and August 2024. There was commitment from the outset to ensuring that children and young people across Highland would be at the heart of the strategy's development and awareness that such co-production would require time and resource.

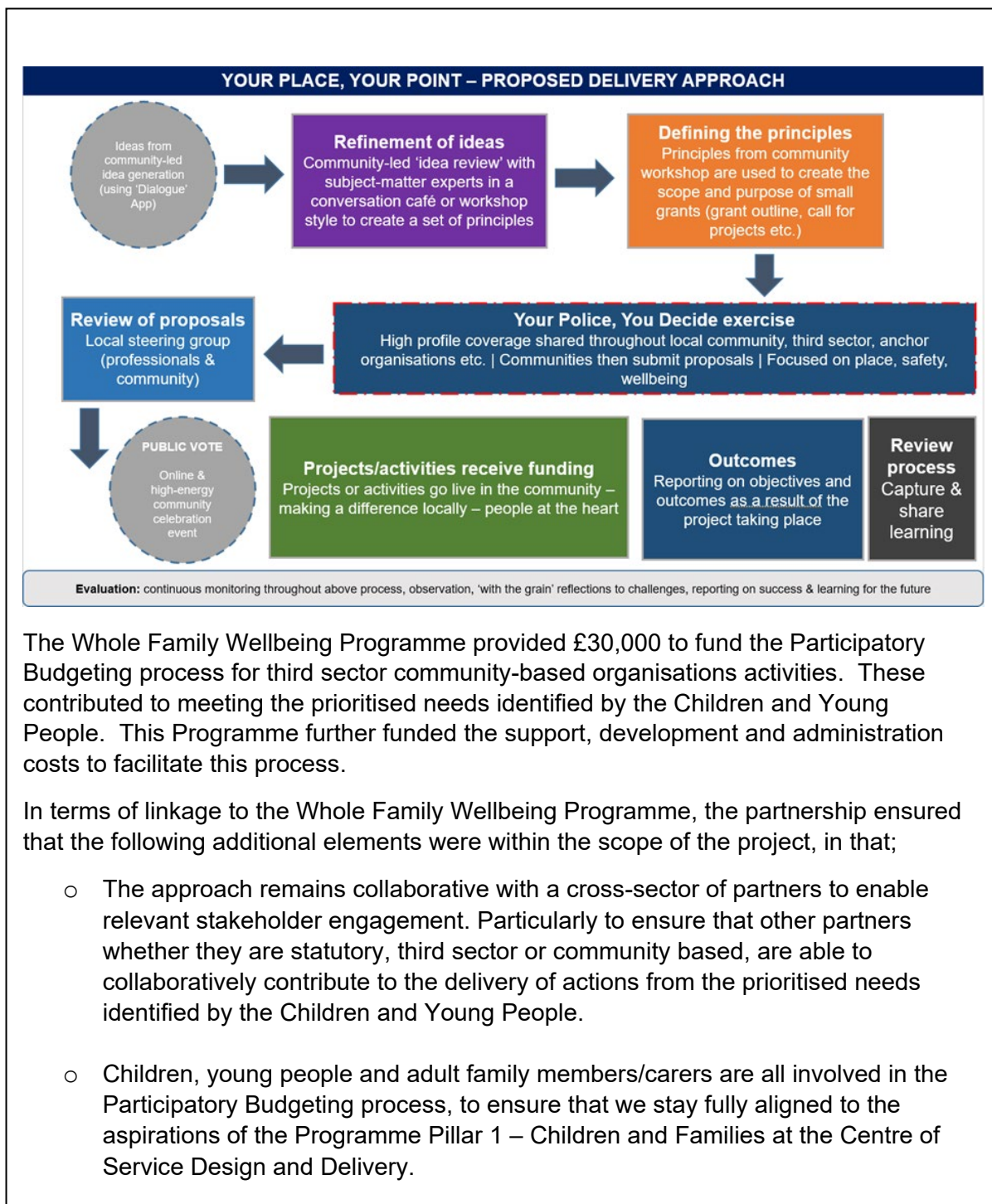
Over 800 children and young people from across Highland participated in the engagement which informed the key themes of the strategy. This engagement took place over 6 months between October 2023 and April 2024 and was facilitated in large part by young facilitators employed by the steering group. The sessions, conversations, focus groups and surveys all sought to understand children and young people's views on participation and what is required to ensure that it becomes a meaningful reality. The key themes they highlighted form the basis of the strategy and inform the commitments outlined.

The strategy was co-written by a group of nine people, five of which were young people. The implementation of the strategy will be overseen by the Children's Rights and Participation Delivery Group of the Integrated Children's Services Board and will require the same cross-partnership commitment and co-production as has driven the development of the strategy itself.

Play Area Review – during 2021/22 a review of play areas was progressed across the Highland area which will support the development of a Play Area Strategy for Highland. A key element of the review has been to consider which play areas across communities are retained and upgraded and communities have been central to this process. A Play Coordinator has been appointed with a role to support communities to develop their local playparks to meet the Highland Council Strategy 2023-2033.

What has evolved, and continues to evolve in different ways, is the cornucopia of participation from different stakeholders and professional relationship building. This creates a deeper understanding of the Play Strategy and encourages Council-wide cohesion with local communities. A simple process has been developed for consulting with children, contacting local schools and nurseries to ask them to support children to complete a simple questionnaire on their three favourite types of play e.g. swinging, sliding, climbing, spinning, jumping etc. By using this method of child consultation, funds are spent on what young people think they need within their own communities. In addition, data is analysed to establish if any of the favourites could be joined together e.g. climbing frame with monkey bars. Once the data has been analysed, the community group and the play coordinator write a simple brief based on the child consultation. Once quotes are received, adults assess them for costs and appropriateness of meeting the Play Strategy. Children then see the final range of designs to vote on their favourite one which is then installed. By using this method, the design of all recently developed playparks is truly child-led.

Whin Park Redevelopment Project – one specific example of involvement on play area development is at Whin Park in Inverness. To aid with the creation of the design brief, an online questionnaire was distributed in April 2023 which received 804 responses which was aimed at all users of the park across Highland. In addition, specific engagement was undertaken with schools located within the immediate area of the park by the play parks Community Support Co-ordinator and the Community Support Officer from the Community Development team. These sessions engaged with 134 young people within four primary schools and one secondary school. There was also engagement with SNAP (Special Needs Action Project) to gather views on inclusivity and accessibility. Following a tender exercise, further engagement was undertaken to identify the preferred design by the public. A public vote was held that sought to understand the preferences in general but also the preference by different age groups. 2,817 votes were received with the majority of responses (60.2%) from young people under the age of eighteen which correlated with the face-to-face engagement undertaken by the Community Support Co-ordinator for play parks.



Engaging and involving communities – Key actions going forward:

The Highland Council is entering an exciting period with opportunities for investment and development on a scale which has not been seen before. However, we need to make certain that every resident in Highland benefits from these investments – to ensure we drive out inequality and instead introduce new and exciting opportunities

for all. This will include job creation, skills development, appropriate and high-quality housing, exceptional adult and childcare facilities as well as schools which deliver on every level. All this will be delivered bearing in mind the Council's commitment to net zero as well as our aim to be ambitious, connected, and sustainable.

Actions include:

- Work to re-establish Access Panels in all areas of Highland and establish and forum for sharing good practice and learning.
- Deliver an Engagement and Involvement Strategy providing a framework to guide how we work together to maximise the benefits to our communities through effective participation and engagement reflecting the Scottish Government's vision "*... that people can be involved in the decisions that affect them, making Scotland a more inclusive, sustainable and successful place*".
- This strategy will set out our commitment to genuine participation and engagement and will establish mechanisms to help identify and remove or mitigate barriers.
- Ongoing work with Community Councils, including the completion of a review of the Community Council scheme which is currently in progress.

1.4 Awareness and promotion

A range of methods are used to raise awareness of, and to promote, equality with employees, Members, and communities, from specific initiatives and events to the use of social media.

A variety of online training courses have been developed for staff. These include courses on Deaf Awareness, Sight Loss awareness and neurodiversity, training around flexible working and specifically how it benefits women. There is also training around sexual harassment and how to prevent it, and a mental health line for staff which is promoted and uses a local telephone number - feedback suggests this makes it seem more usable and accessible,

The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process required for all decisions and for new policies and strategies is also itself a regular reminder for both staff and Members of the importance of equality, and information on the IIA is included prominently on such committee reports, This also enables the public to scrutinise the Council's decision making through the lens of equality.

The Council also regularly uses press releases to promote equality. Listed below are some examples of how the Council has promoted equality during the 2023 – 2025 period:

Positive Destinations - In May 2023 the Caithness Councillors paid tribute to the work being done to ensure young people in the area are more prepared to enter a 'positive destination' on leaving school such as higher education, further education, training, employment, and voluntary work. The report highlighted the 'My Future, My Success' (MFMS) partnership approach to empower young people across the Highlands to think about their future careers and aspirations by connecting them with a network of support, employability and enterprise learning, mentoring and personal skills building, ensuring that their future is determined by potential not by background, barriers, or the postcode that they come from. The report noted 91% of young people in Caithness had engaged with MFMS and of the 7 young people due to leave school soon, 6 were expected to achieve a positive destination. [Caithness Committee highlights positive impact My Future My Success is having | The Highland Council](#)

Winter Payments: In June 2023 Councillors set aside £0.2m Inverness Common Good Funding to help eligible people in help Inverness area most at need to heat their homes in the Inverness area with a one-off payment. Promotion of this payment also directed people to the Welfare Support Team and the advice they can provide as well as [The Worrying About Money?](#) guide which covers information for people waiting for claims to be assessed as well as those already receiving benefits. [Councillors agree funding for 2023/24 Inverness area Winter Payment scheme | The Highland Council](#)

Engaging Young People: In September 2023 the Council encouraged children of all ages, teenagers, parents, and caregivers to complete a questionnaire to capture their

views regarding the Council's 321 free-to-use playparks and the benefits they bring, supporting children in learning to develop adult skills such as negotiating, communication, building positive relationships, creativity, teamwork, problem solving, resilience, knowing how to have fun, and community belonging. [Let's talk about play! Council asking for children's input to play park strategy | The Highland Council](#)

Prevent: Also, in September 2023 the Council promoted the Prevent Suicide Highland smartphone App which aims to provide awareness about suicide and preventative information to support people feeling suicidal or family, friends, and professionals to support individuals. Offering key local and national contacts that can support people in the immediate or longer term. [Five years since the Suicide Highland Smartphone App was launched in Highland | The Highland Council](#)

Supporting young person's wellbeing: An in-house school counselling service was promoted in September 2023 regarding its work to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people across the Highland area. The main reasons for referral to school counselling across Highland were found to align with those to other mental health services. Anxiety remains the main concern for children and young people. Other main reasons for referral to school counselling include low mood, emotional/behavioural needs, self-harm, body image, and trauma. These key issues helped shape the content of awareness raising training delivered by specialist services. [Counselling in Highland schools | The Highland Council](#) .

Operation Respect had been running for several years, aimed at ensuring Inverness city centre remains a safe place to live, work and visit over the festive season. It was promoted in November 2023. It is led by Police Scotland, with support from several agencies and local voluntary partners, including Highland Council. The agencies combine their specialisms to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour, disorder, retail crime and other forms of criminality. It is also designed to provide help to vulnerable people – whether that is as a result of mental health concerns, alcohol or substance abuse - and allows a safe environment and pastoral care to anyone in need. [Highland Council joined partner agencies in Inverness today at launch of Operation Respect 2023 | The Highland Council](#)

Children's Rights were also promoted in November 2023 noting work. A press release noted that empowering children and young people to understand and exercise their rights has been a focus in Highland for many years. We are continually working to establish a culture of respect in all educational settings so that, no matter how young our pupils are, they have access to a space where they feel comfortable to share their views and voice. It was noted that over 100 of Highland schools participated in UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award programme and also that Aviemore Primary School achieved their Gold accreditation this year. The UNICEF's Rights Respecting School's Award carries the values that children have a safe space and inspiring place to learn, children are respected, their talents nurtured, and they

are able to thrive. The Silver Award recognises that schools have shown good progress in embedding children's rights in their school. The Gold Award is granted to schools that have fully embedded the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in their practice and ethos. One focus includes raising attainment and achievement for all, especially for children and young people from disadvantaged circumstances.

[Furthering children's rights in schools | The Highland Council](#)

Also in November 2023 the 'Its OK to ask' campaign encouraged any parent or carer struggling to meet the financial demands of looking after their children to ask for help before reaching crisis point [News archive November 2023 | The Highland Council](#)

In February 2024 a generous donation from an individual and 2 local groups funded placements for a group of local staff on their level 2 Makaton course. Staff in the school were already using Makaton but the donation supported further progress towards the school's goal of the nursery gaining a Makaton friendly status. [Community donations fund Makaton course for nursery staff | The Highland Council](#)

Bairns Hoose': In May 2024 the Bairns Hoose' was launched in the Highlands. The aim is to reduce the number of times children are asked to retell their stories as this can be difficult and retraumatising. Instead, trauma-informed practice is prioritised to support the child's recovery in a safe, respectful, friendly, and welcoming environment. Implementation of the Bairns' Hoose standards is overseen by Highland Child Protection Committee and the Public Protection Chief Officer Group, ensuring services and communities are involved in developing and supporting approaches to improve outcomes for children and families. [Launch of Bairns' Hoose Highland | The Highland Council](#)

Language Guide: Also in May 2024, a new pro-active language guide was launched by The Highland Council supported by the Highland Child Protection Committee. The Language guide to be provided for practitioners is in the form of a Microbyte and is aimed at assisting organisations in Highland to keep 'The Promise'. The promise is that Scotland's children and young people will grow up loved, safe and respected. Full details on The Promise are at: <https://thepromise.scot/> ([external link](#))

Fundamental to keeping The Promise is the language used and that organisations with responsibility towards care experienced children and young people are able to demonstrate they are embedding destigmatising language and practices across the way they work. [Language guide aims to help Highland keep 'The Promise' | The Highland Council](#)

Promoting Positive Mental Health: The Highland Council supported Mental Health Awareness Week (10th May 2024) . Each year Mental Health Awareness Week aims to raise awareness of mental health and encourage people to reach out for help and to also support others. The awareness theme for 2024 was 'movement: moving more for our mental health'. There was a focus on raising Mental Health Awareness among the Council's workforce through the delivery of a range of drop-in and support

sessions. This also supports staff to reach out to family and friends and encourage others to be active with you can create a shared welcome relief to those who are struggling. The press release also highlighted the availability of further information on Highland Mental Wellbeing and the Prevent Suicide Highland Smartphone App which provides guidance for members of the public as to what they can do to help someone experiencing mental distress and perhaps contemplating suicide.

[Prevent Suicide - Highland - Apple App Store](#)

[Prevent Suicide - Highland - Apps on Google Play](#)

Supporting Refugees: In June 2024 a free film screening was advertised of the 2020 British comedy-drama film, *Limbo*, in support of Refugee Week 2024. After the film there was also an opportunity to hear from a panel of expert speakers who will share their views on 'Rural Scotland, Social Work and Migration.' Speakers included Colin Turbett, author and leading expert in social work practice and rural setting; Roza Salih, human rights activist and co-founder of the Glasgow Girls; Jen Ang, international human rights lawyer; and Jacqueline Hutchinson, strategic lead for children's services for The Highland Council. The film centres on four asylum seekers who are staying on a remote island in Scotland, and taking cultural awareness classes, while awaiting the processing of their refugee claims. Pupils from nearby schools were also invited to help them gain a greater understanding of the personal struggle that refugee and asylum-seeking people experience when integrating themselves into a rural community. This event was organised jointly with Third Sector Partners including Aberlour Children's Charity, Barnardo's, Gateway, Right There, and Guardianship Scotland. Eden Court Theatre kindly supported this event as host [Free film screening in support of Refugee Week 2024 | The Highland Council](#)

Supporting Highland Pride: In June 2024 Highland Council also highlighted the flying of the Rainbow Flag in Inverness to show support for the Highland Pride parade taking place during Pride Month. [Highland Council to fly Rainbow Flags for Highland Pride | The Highland Council](#)

Promoting BSL: In September 2024 the adoption of the new BSL Plan for 2024 - 2030 provided an opportunity to highlight the BSL community and their involvement in the development of the new Plan. [Highland integrated British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030 | The Highland Council](#)

Tackling Child Poverty: In November 2024 the Council emphasised the importance of action on Child poverty and highlighted the strong commitment in Highland to address poverty and inequality. The vision for the Community Planning Partnership through its Highland Outcome Improvement Plan is 'To work together to reduce inequality within Highland communities' and requires the continuation of a holistic whole system approach to poverty. [Highland Council approach to local child poverty | The Highland Council](#)

Promoting Infant Feeding: In February 2025 Highland Council celebrated Gold Infant Feeding Award from Unicef BFI. This award specifically indicates sustainability of practice meaning the service has embedded Baby Friendly standards into its leadership, culture and daily practice. It is a significant accomplishment that reflects

a services' commitment to embedding practice that benefit infant health, parental wellbeing, and long-term public health outcomes for both parent and infant.

Supporting Vulnerable Adults: In February 2025 Adult Support and Protection Day was highlighted, noting that it takes place on Thursday 20 February 2025 and everyone was urged to be alert to vulnerable adults in their communities who are susceptible to financial harm and to report any concerns to ensure those in need are able to access support. [Adult Support and Protection Day 2025 | The Highland Council](#)

Awareness and Promotion – Key actions going forward:

- Continue to promote initiative and activities
- Increase use of social media and other online options

1.5 Partnership Working

Partnership working in Highland is delivered under the umbrella of the Highland Community Planning Partnership. There is a history of local partners working together on equality, from joint training, shared equality outcomes, and partnership approaches to interpretation and communication support and tackling gender-based violence. Examples are highlighted throughout the report.

Highland Outcome Improvement Plan

The CPP has taken significant steps to tackle inequalities through the 2024-2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP). The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) aims to tackle the issues that lead to inequalities. To address barriers arising from protected characteristics, equality of opportunity is a cross-cutting theme of the Plan.

Following a significant period of engagement the 2024 – 2027 HOIP was published, including the updated Vision: Maximise Opportunities and Tackle Inequality to Build a Thriving Highlands For All and the inclusion of three high level strategic priorities:

- People – Enable people to live independently, safe and well within their community
- Place – Work in partnership to develop sustainable and resilient local communities
- Prosperity – Creating opportunities for all people and places to prosper and to thrive economically

The aim is for the HOIP to be the overarching plan and framework for Highland; a plan that expresses the key challenges and inequalities facing our area and how the Partnership and individual partners will address these. This in turn will support delivery of individual partner plans.

The plan integrates equality into the day-to-day work of the Council and other partners by focusing on strategic priorities that enable individuals to live independently, develop sustainable communities, and create economic opportunities.

Health Inequalities Short Life Working Group

The Health Inequalities SLWG was formed as part of the HOIP delivery plan, tasked with identifying a framework for how the Community Planning Partnership can monitor and receive up-to-date reporting on health inequalities with the aim of identifying opportunities to improve outcomes for communities.

The Health Inequalities SLWG aims to:

- Identify and Address Health Inequalities: Focus on the root causes of health inequalities as identified within the [Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2024](#).

- Promote Collaborative Working: Foster collaboration among various partners, including public sector bodies and third sector organisations, to identify data sources and needs.
- Enhance Access to Services: Provide evidence to promote equitable access to services and support for all individuals, particularly those in remote and rural areas.

The group operates under the principles of person-centred services, trauma-informed practices, and preventative approaches. By integrating services and support, the SLWG aims to maximise data resources, reduce duplication, and support the development of solutions tailored to local needs.

Poverty Reduction Group

The Poverty Reduction Group sits under the Highland Community Planning Partnership. Representation includes NHS Highland, Highland Council, but also 3rd sector representation, including childcare providers and the Highland Poverty Action network.

Reducing child poverty is a priority theme within the Highland's Integrated Children's Service Plan which sits within a context of the Community Planning Partnership and delivering against the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

The child poverty action group partnership recognises that children's services planning and planning to reduce child poverty is an ongoing process and that central to good planning is to ensure robust connections between all national and local strategic planning. The child poverty plan connects the partnership strategic planning within a single framework. This framework provides both the tools for planning, self-evaluation, reporting, performance management and assurance.

The child poverty plan articulates how partners work together to provide services which are organised, equipped to deliver high-quality, joined-up, trauma-informed and responsive and preventative support to children, young people and families.

Case Study - Maximising Benefit Uptake

Support for families to maximise incomes and ensure households access all entitlements continues to be a focus for partners. Specialist support is available through the Highland Council Welfare Team and CAB Highland network. More than 26,500 residents within Highland sought support from Welfare services (Highland Council and CAB) during the financial year 23/24 (latest data available). This generated more than 111,300 client contacts seeking advice on a variety of issues including cost of living, welfare, money and housing.

- In Highland, financial gains derived for clients during 2023/24, by these welfare services, exceeded £28.8m (+£2.5m compared with 22/23)

- Scottish Child Payment – Highland - 195,530 payments made up to 30/06/24, value of payments £28,322,766; for the period 2023-2024 - 86,210 payments made, value of payments £15,521,675
- Best Start Grant & Best Start Foods – Highland – Payments made up to 30/06/24, unfortunately payments cannot be broken down into the financial years.

Pregnancy & Baby Payment	Early Learning Payment	School Age Payment	Best Start Foods
£1,398,898	£1,168,450	£1,201,166	£1,844,526

- Child Disability Payment – Highland - 138,620 payments made up to 30/06/24, value of payments £28,551,040

Health and Social Care Partnership

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 put in place the framework for the Integration of health and social care in Scotland for adults. Health and social care partnerships (HSCP) were formed which gave the joint responsibility to NHS boards and local authorities, to work in partnership with the third sector, users, carers and other key stakeholders, including the independent sector to deliver those integrated services. In Highland Partnership arrangements had been in place since 2012 and these are consistent with the lead agency model set out in the 2014 legislation. In terms of that NHS Highland are the lead agency for the delivery of integrated adult health and social care services and The Highland Council are the lead agency for integrated children's services.

The Highland Partnership of NHS Highland and the Highland Council is committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for all service users. The aim of integration is to improve the wellbeing of people in Highland, particularly those whose needs are complex and involve support from health and social care at the same time. The Highland Council and NHS Highland through the Lead Agency arrangements commits to achieving the National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes prescribed by the Scottish Ministers. The Highland Council and NHS Highland have included Children and Families social work services within the Lead Agency arrangements with the aim of ensuring that all children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential. The Highland Council and NHS Highland through the Lead Agency arrangements therefore also commit to achieving the national outcomes for Children and Families set out by the Scottish Ministers.

Resettlement Partnership

Highland Council has a strong track record in supporting refugees, welcoming families fleeing war to resettle here in recent years. The following resettlement schemes have been supported to date:

- Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (Syrian Programme) in 2016.
- Afghan Relocation and Resettlement Programme (ARAP) in 2021
- Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children (UASC) in 2022
- Homes for Ukraine (HFU) in 2022

Resettlement schemes are fully funded by the Home Office with guidance to support ESOL (English language), housing support, employment and integration into the local community and life in the UK.

Collaborative work is key to the success of resettlement programmes and The Resettlement Team work closely with council teams as well as partner agencies and communities in delivering services to households requiring resettlement and humanitarian support.

The Adult Education Team assess everyone on arrival and provide ESOL classes, with funding provided by the Home Office, to help improve English language from the start. The team also facilitate community integration by working with Highlife Highland to support individuals with swimming lessons, creative sewing classes for women and an Afghan football team for the men. The Welfare Team provide support with applications for benefits and The Employability team provide support to identify opportunities for job progression.

The Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSi) employ a Refugee Resettlement Officer with funding provided to Highland Council via the Home Office to support engagement with activities in the community such as hill-walking and creative projects with Eden Court.

Partner agencies include New Start Highland (NSH) who are contracted to provide the housing support for newly arrived families. Resettled families require a period of intensive support in the first six months and the Resettlement Officers at the council work closely with NSH to ensure they receive the support they need as set out in the New Scots Strategy 2024.

Case study: Support and Welcoming Displaced People into Highland – Ukraine Programme

The Russian invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022 and the UK Government set up the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme to support Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs) who fled their homes because of the invasion. Highland Council has supported 233 UDPs hosted by Highland sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

The Resettlement Team, along with other Council Services and partner agencies including the NHS and HTSi, have helped sponsors supporting UDPs with the administration of host payments; access to benefits; facilitating English language classes; providing employability support; developing links to higher education; and other means to help the households integrate into Highland life.

The Scottish Super Sponsorship Scheme (SSS) was introduced by the Scottish Government with temporary hotel accommodation across seven hotels in Highland and support for 412 UDPs in Highland. All children in temporary hotel accommodation were registered in local schools and provided with school uniforms, school transport where required and given access to school meals. Adults were given access to ESOL classes provided by High Life Highland and many registered for full-time ESOL classes at UHI Inverness.

Over the past two years, the Resettlement Team have collaborated with Scottish Government colleagues and teams in other local authorities, in line with the Move-on Policy issued by Scottish Government, to support UDPs with their housing options. Several families chose to remain in Highland in private rentals or were successful in obtaining social tenancies. The Resettlement Team will continue to collaborate with key partners and our Scottish Government colleagues to fully support those individuals and families wishing to settle in Highland.

Partnership Working - Key actions going forward:

- Re-tendering for interpretation services with NHS Highland
- Re-establish partnership equality group
- A new Short Life Working Group focussing on Health Inequalities has been established in 2025. Working towards aligning HOIP priorities with Health Inequalities and utilising evidence and data effectively.

1.6 Education and Learning

Data from the biennial Highland Lifestyle survey shows:

1. A reduction in number of pupils reporting being in trouble with the police. This has been a general trend since 2015

2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
14.40	10.80%	8.78%	10.61%	9.31%	7.50%

2. An increase in multiple measures relating to children's rights and participation. More pupils report that they are aware of their rights and that adults in school talk to them about this.
3. A Highland bullying survey is available for schools to use to assess the extent of discrimination and bullying in their school, where and why. However, P7, S2 and S4 pupils are asked directly about bullying in the lifestyle survey. There continues to be a general trend towards children reporting that they have **NOT** been bullied in the past 12 months, after a rise was noted over the 'COVID years'.

2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
59.3%	62.56%	68.52%	62.33%	60.36%

Our Positive Relationships Anti-Bullying Guidance was created by young people from Skye and is in line with Scottish Government Guidance. It provides information for school staff and pupils on various protected characteristics and how to support the acceptance and support for diversity in schools and to reduce stigma.

For most children who do report being bullied in the Lifestyle Survey, gender-based bullying remains the highest reported reason. Although there is much media attention about online bullying, this remains relatively low compared to face-to-face bullying and has been fairly consistent in reports from children over a number of years. Lessons on staying safe online for pupils and parents are regularly offered to help with this.

Enhancing equality through the development of literacy:

Books have the power to shape the way children see themselves and the world. They can act as **mirrors** that reflect what we know about ourselves and the world we live in. They can also act as **windows** into worlds and experiences that are different to our own.

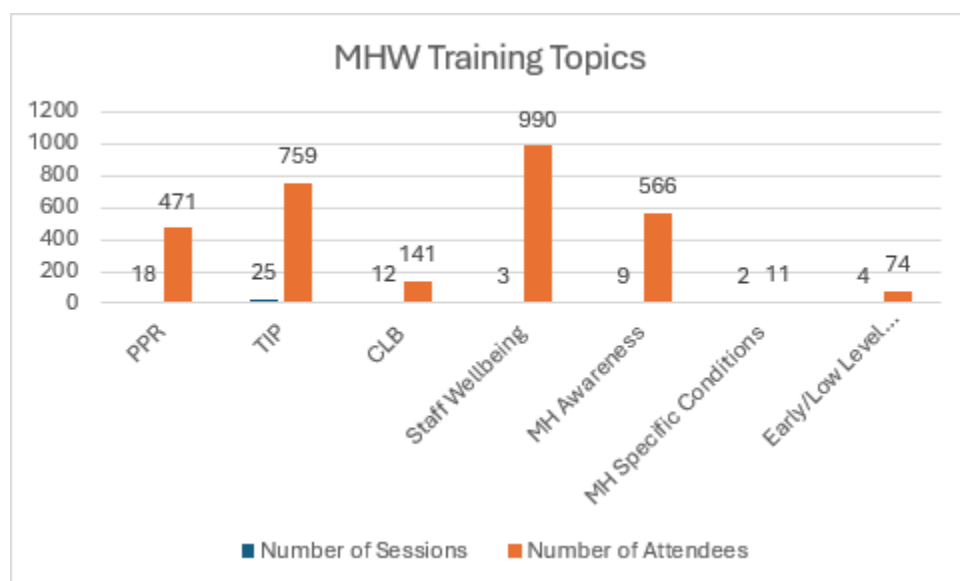
Working with Highland One World, schools in Highland can borrow boxes of recommended books aimed at addressing racism and increasing awareness of

different cultures for each literacy level, Books can be loaned out for free to settings and schools in the Inverness area. HOW also deliver free professional learning sessions with an anti-racist focus based on this resource.

Highland Council have also published a series of lesson plans to support the development of Equality and Diversity across the curriculum. [18 picture books](#) have been selected; for each picture book there have been lessons created for Early – Fourth Levels (Curriculum for Excellence) driven by the Literacy and English and Health and Wellbeing Experiences and Outcomes.

Psychological Service training:

In session 2023-24 a total of 6837 people benefited from the training offered by the Service, an increase from 3627 in the previous session. 44% of those participants attending training sessions delivered by the Service last year attended sessions under the theme of Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing. The training on Mental Health and Wellbeing is in line with the Scottish Government guidance on supporting a whole school approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing and each of the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators, and is promoted through the Wellbeing Highland Website. In the 12 months from July 2023 to June 2024, 71 mental health and wellbeing related training sessions were delivered to 2942 professionals under a range of subthemes as indicated below:



Children's Rights and the Rights Respecting Schools Award

The Rights Respecting Schools Programme and Award has been created by UNICEF and recognises a school's achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into practice within the school and beyond. Many schools have registered with the programme and to date this academic session (2024-5), 6 gold visits have taken place – one gold was not awarded. 2

further gold visits have been planned before the end of the session. The forecast would be for 8 newly accredited Gold schools in the 2024/2025 session

10 silver visits have taken place to date this session with 9 further Silver visits remain before the end of the session. The forecast is for 19 newly accredited silver schools in the 2024/2025 session

Looking ahead to 2025/2026 we have a large number of requests for assessment already received with dates to be confirmed, ideally before the end of term:

- 23 individual schools have requested their silver accreditation.
- 4 schools have booked their gold accreditation

In December 2022, 4 schools had been awarded Gold Status. By June 2024, 7 schools had been awarded Gold Status. Projected by June 2025: 15 Gold Schools.

The UNCRC Incorporation Act (Scotland) (2024) has supported out work towards promoting children's rights and helping them claim and realise their rights as described in the Articles of the UNCRC. The support we provide schools, ELCs and wider children's services is supported by a Children's Rights and Participation website: <https://www.childrensrighthighland.co.uk/childrens-rights>

This website includes a 'Library of Voices' that is facilitating data collection about the participatory work that is happening across Highland.

We use an MS Form to find out about the work that is being done. It is broken down by Consultation, Research, Survey and Participatory Activities/Case Studies.

As we gather information, we will look to share case studies and contact info for the people carrying out the work. Our Privacy Statement is here.

We hope this will help us share what C&YP have to say, decrease duplication, help us give more C&YP access and opportunities to have their say and inform service provision that leads to better outcomes for children and young people.

Case Study – Supporting Children & Young People from Armed Forces Families

The Military Liaison Group (Education) provides a unique partnership of services and agencies that come together regularly to ensure we are getting it right for Children and Young People from Armed Forces Families in Highland. Its work is informed by Children and Young People's experiences, gains their voices (UNCRC Article 12) and encourages them to express their thoughts and feelings (UNCRC Article 13). MLG partners also talk and listen to families' views to gain their views and act on needs as appropriate.

The MLG is a **tri-service partnership** that works operationally within an educational context and works with Children and Young People, their families, education settings and specialist services to ensure equity and equality so they suffer no disadvantage due to being from a military family.

MLG strives to ensure equity and equality and the best possible outcome within education for Children and Young People from Armed Forces families across Highland, Serving, Reservist and Veteran families.



How the MLG support children and young people to thrive in Highland and suffer no disadvantage in their education due to being from a military family (Army, Navy or RAF) whether Serving, Reservist or Veteran:

- Helping families navigate and understand the Scottish Education system, year groups and Enrolment process to enable a smooth transition into Highland.
- Getting the right information to you promptly to support your enquiry or signposting you directly to the person that can help.
- Provide resources and training to educationalists and practitioners to support and promote awareness and understanding of being from an Armed Forces Family and the challenges around interrupted education, mobility, deployment and separation.

Deaf Education Services

For over 30 years, British Sign Language (BSL) has been part of the mainstream language options available in Dingwall Academy to both d/Deaf and hearing pupils from S2 – S6. BSL is delivered by the Highland Deaf Education Service staff. Dingwall Academy has a resource base for pupils with hearing issues. The Service has delivered Scotvec units, Signature qualifications SQA units and currently delivers SQA National Awards in BSL at SCQF Levels 3, 4,5 and 6. As a measure of the success of BSL within the school, ten Dingwall Academy pupils have gone on to study BSL at Higher Education level with 6 having already qualified as BSL/English interpreters.

The 1+2 Languages Initiative in Scotland aims to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn a modern language from a young age. The Highland Deaf Education Unit developed a digital learning & teaching pack as part of the 1+2 languages initiative to encourage and support the learning and teaching of BSL as a mainstream language, without the need for a teacher to be a sign language user. This pack is freely available to all Highland staff, with over 50 primary schools and a number of secondaries currently using it. Over 300 teachers in Highland have been trained to use the pack.

As a result of the pack, there are more people learning BSL in Highland than in any other region in Scotland. The pack is well regarded elsewhere and all local authorities in Scotland, all of Northern Ireland and 4 English Local Authorities have bought the pack. The Pack also won last year's National Award for Innovation in the Field of Inclusion. This is quite an achievement as the Pack has never been advertised and has spread by word of mouth!

Community-Based Adult ESOL & Community Integration, Afghan Resettlement Scheme

Case Study 1: Culturally inclusive, women-only swimming sessions at Culloden Leisure Centre

Afghan women shared their need to learn to swim. For cultural and religious reasons, the women, who have recently been resettled in Inverness from Afghanistan, are unable to use mixed-gender facilities for exercise, especially swimming.

In partnership with High Life Highland Sports and Leisure, Adult Learning organised weekly women-only swimming tuition and open swimming sessions Culloden Leisure Centre. A group of Afghan women, provided with full cover modesty swimwear as part of the initiative, have been learning to swim with a female instructor for the first time in their lives.

The women, some of whom are also learning to drive – a skills that is prohibited for women in Afghanistan – were unable to access the leisure centre due to a lack of transport and cultural barriers that prevented them from easily being able to use public transport. Working closely with HTSI, Adult Learning engaged with a group of female volunteer drivers who give up their time each week to transport the Afghan women from their homes to their swimming lesson and back again. The volunteers often join the women for swimming, offering them women an opportunity to practise their conversational English language skills and to build friendships with local people.



Case Study 2: ESOL for Driving

Driving Theory is a popular learning goal among migrant and refugee communities. The opportunity for adult learners to learn dedicated driving theory and English language skills through our ESOL for Driving courses is particularly meaningful for Afghan women because, in Afghanistan, driving licenses for women are largely prohibited.

This year, seven Afghan women attended ESOL for Driving classes. One learner has already passed her theory test and is ready to embrace the practical stage of the challenge!

Community-based ESOL contextualises learning in its social context. Learners don't only develop language skills but learn about cultural customs of their subject to help them navigate life in a new place.

Learners' long-term goals include the ability to make journeys independently – something that was prohibited for women in Afghanistan – and to access services, employment, medical appointments, leisure and recreation, and family time in local green spaces. Driving provides learners with freedom, flexibility and independence but, for ESOL learners, this all starts in the ESOL classroom.



Education - Key actions going forward:

- Develop a strong ethos & culture of rights & respect based on UNCRC.
- Improve children and young people's involvement in decision making.
- Children and Young People report improvements in their health and wellbeing, with all schools having a robust approach to reducing bullying and improving relationships.
- Improvement in attainment of children and young people affected by poverty.
- Implement a comprehensive CLD and Employability learning programme for achievement of core skills qualifications for those living in the top Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 1 and 2 data zones.

1.7 Highland Licensing Board

The Highland Licensing Board (“the Board”) has responsibility for liquor licensing functions under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 and gambling functions under the Gambling Act 2005.

The Board is required to publish a statement of their alcohol licensing policy within 18 months of an election for councillors for local government under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. The current policy statement will apply from 4 November 2023 to 3 November 2028. In preparing the licensing policy statement, the Board must seek to promote the statutory licensing objectives, which are:

- Preventing crime and disorder
- Securing public safety
- Preventing public nuisance
- Protecting and improving public health
- Protecting children and young persons from harm

Every three years, the Board is also required to publish a policy statement of gambling principles it proposes to apply in exercising its function under the Gambling Act 2005. The current policy will apply from 4 January 2025 to 1 January 2028.

The Board is supported by a Clerk and a team of support staff and three Licensing Standards Officers. All staff carrying out the Board’s responsibilities are recruited and employed by The Highland Council. The Board works and engages with the Highland Licensing Forum. The Forum gives general advice and makes recommendations to the Board but does not review, give advice, nor make recommendations in relation to the Board’s exercise of its functions in respect of an individual case.

The Licensing Board and Equality

The Board aims, at all times, to act in accordance with the public sector duties under equality legislation. In 2013, the Board set out its commitment to equality in its Equality Strategy where it recognised that equality is a continuing journey. Since 2015, the Board has aligned its equality duties with those of the Highland Council and the Highland Education Authority. This approach acknowledges the work of each body to contribute to common aims to advance equality.

The Board also expects licence holders to address equalities issues in all aspects of the operation of their premises. In this regard, it should be noted that since 1 April 2018 applicants for new premises licences have been required by law to include with their licence application a disabled access and facilities statement in a prescribed form. An application cannot be considered by the Board unless accompanied by a completed statement.

Licensing Board – Key actions going forward:

Involvement with Violence Against Women partnership training programme (Equality Outcome 3)

Section 2 Employment

2.1 Equalities in Employment Monitoring Report 2025

Introduction

The Highland Council is committed, through policy and action, to eliminate discrimination and promote equality. The Council is particularly aware of the duties under the Equality Act 2010 in terms of employment monitoring and is obligated to meeting these.

This report includes the findings of analysis relating to the protected characteristics including age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, maternity and pregnancy, transgender and caring responsibilities. The snapshot date for this report 31 March 2025.

Our new updated Equality Monitoring Form was launched in 2024, through our self-serve system for employees. Staff communications were issued throughout 2024/25 to explain the importance of staff completing this information, whilst also reassuring employees that their information is protected and will remain anonymous. The data being requested matches the Census 2022 categories.

As a result of the new form, we have seen an increase in the number of employees submitting their equalities data. This is a positive step forward and we can already see a reduction in data gaps.

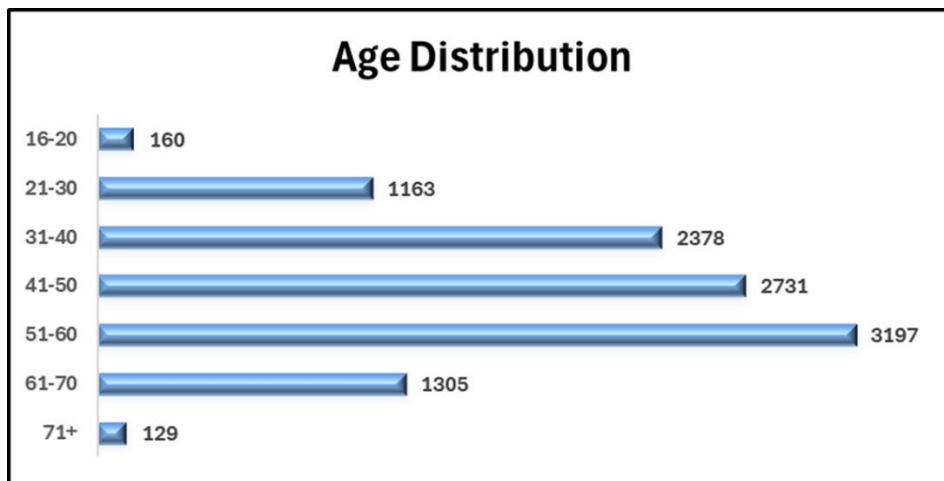
To support further progress, we will promote the form throughout the year via regular communications to employees. Managers will also prompt their employees to complete the form if they have not already done so.

The Council currently holds data on 100% of the workforce in relation to age and sex (gender), 47% of the workforce in relation to disability and 43% in relation to race (ethnic group). The information recorded for the other protected characteristics has now vastly improved, however it is still limited in comparison.

The data in this report shows that we currently hold 35% of the workforce data in relation to religion or belief and sexual orientation. 34% in relation to Transgender and Caring Responsibilities and 32% in relation to Marriage or Civil Partnership. The outcomes and action plans supported by this report are published in the Equalities Mainstreaming Progress Report which will be considered by the Communities and Place Committee in May 2025.

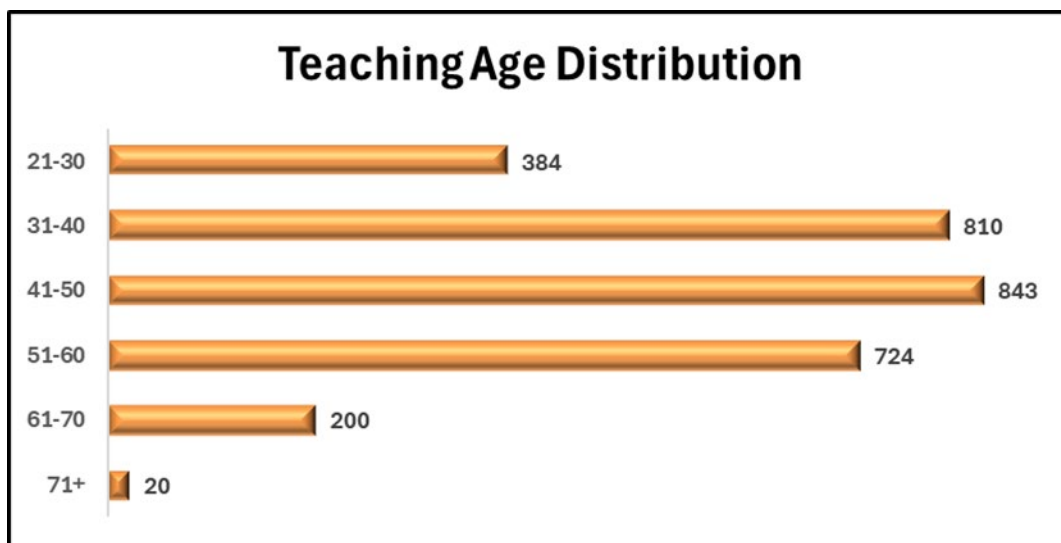
Age

Analysis of data relating to age distribution shows a high proportion of staff aged between 41 and 60 years of age and a low proportion of staff aged 30 and under.

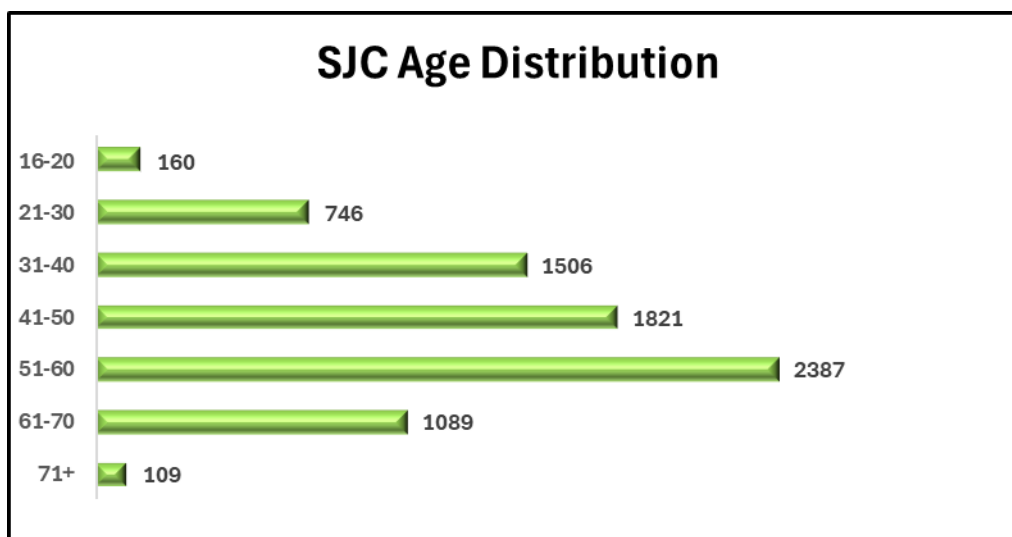


The Distribution of All Employees by Age (Figure 1)

Comparison of the two major groups, teaching staff and Scottish Joint Council (SJC) staff continues to show an even more marked slant in the SJC workforce with over 3 times as many employees aged 51-60 versus those aged 21-30.



The Distribution of All Employees by Age (Figure 2)



The Distribution of All Employees by Age (Figure 3)

Age and Job Type

SJC staff under 30 are found predominantly in the Technical & Practical, Personal Care and Business Support job families and in the lower grades 1 to 5. The majority of staff who continue to work beyond 70 years of age do so in Technical & Practical jobs and in lower graded work.

Age Range	Business Support	Community	Management	Personal Care	Professional & Specialist	Technical & Practical	Total	%
16-20	15	1		72		72	160	2.0%
21-30	134	18	1	317	78	198	746	9.5%
31-40	181	47	13	631	201	433	1506	19.3%
41-50	245	55	51	695	258	517	1821	23.3%
51-60	312	109	92	693	316	865	2387	30.5%
61-70	121	47	26	264	98	533	1089	13.9%
71+	9	6		19	6	69	109	1.4%
Total	1017	283	183	2691	957	2687	7818	

The Distribution of Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Employees by Age and Job Family ((Figure 4)

Grade	Age Range							Total
	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	
HC01	23	17	32	58	89	116	42	377
HC02	13	42	141	143	201	133	16	689
HC03	39	139	208	233	278	131	15	1043
HC04	49	179	371	519	665	296	22	2101
HC05	12	189	319	324	401	157	4	1406
HC05APP	22	8	3	1	1	0	0	35
HC06	2	64	144	131	158	76	3	578
HC07	0	59	113	132	222	72	2	600
HC08	0	14	42	53	71	25	1	206
HC09	0	28	72	99	119	40	1	359
HC10	0	7	46	69	89	19	2	232
HC11	0	0	9	37	49	7	1	103
HC12	0	0	6	11	22	9	0	48
HC13	0	0	0	6	10	5	0	21
HC14	0	0	0	5	9	1	0	15
HC15	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	5
Total	160	746	1506	1821	2387	1089	109	7818

*The Distribution of Scottish Joint Council (SJC)
Employees by Age and Grade (Figure 5)*

Disability

10% of the total Council workforce identify as having a long-term health problem or being disabled. This equates to 20.2% of almost half of the Council workforce who completed an Equality Monitoring Form.

In comparison, in the 2022 census, 23.8% of the Highland community identified themselves as having a long-term health problem or disability. Based on the data disclosed, this suggests that our workforce largely reflects the wider Highland community.

Disability	Total Workforce	Day-to-day activities limited a lot		Day-to-day activities limited a little		Day-to-day activities not limited		Prefer not to say		No Data	
	11064	65	0.6%	1051	9.5%	4156	37.6%	246	2.2%	5546	50.1%

The Distribution of All Employees by Disability (Figure 6)

Disability	Starters	Leavers
Yes	138	10
No	339	159
Unknown	1187	1034

The Distribution of All Employees Joining and Leaving the Council by Disability (Figure 7)

Training Stats by Disability	Applied		Received	
	No.	%	No.	%
Not Limited	3029	45%	3029	45%
Yes, limited a little	711	11%	711	11%
Yes, limited a lot	39	1%	39	1%
Unknown	2949	44%	2949	44%

The Distribution of training for All Employees by Disability (Figure 8)

Occupational Segregation by Disability

In relation to occupational segregation, there is no discernible difference between those employees who identify as being disabled versus those who do not who work in similar roles.

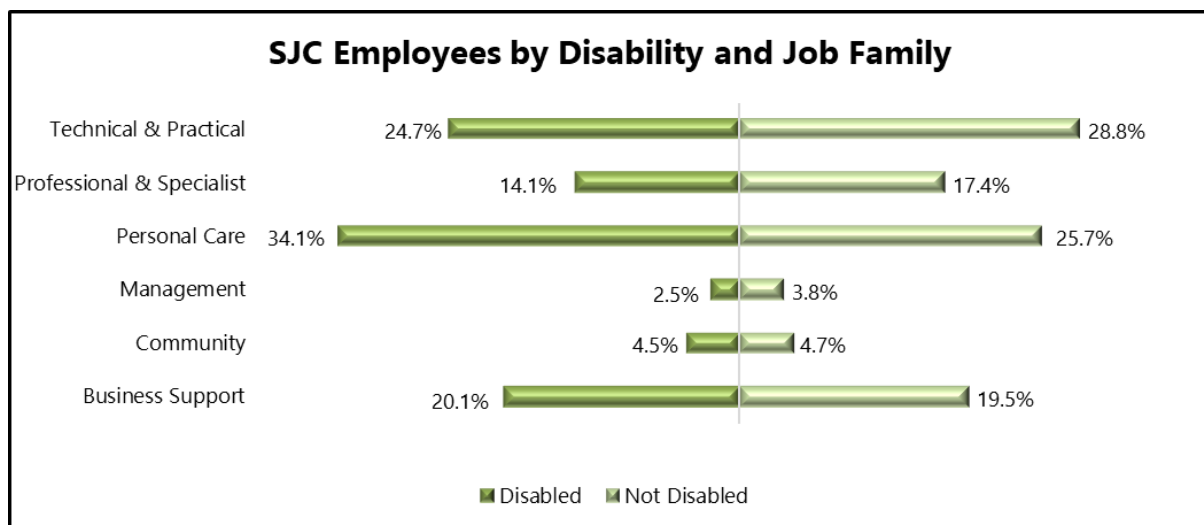
Disabled and non-disabled employees are found in similar ratios across Business Support, Technical & Practical, Community and Professional & Specialist roles. Disabled employees are slightly overrepresented in Personal Care roles and underrepresented in management roles.

Disabled employees are underrepresented in the most senior grades, HC12-15.

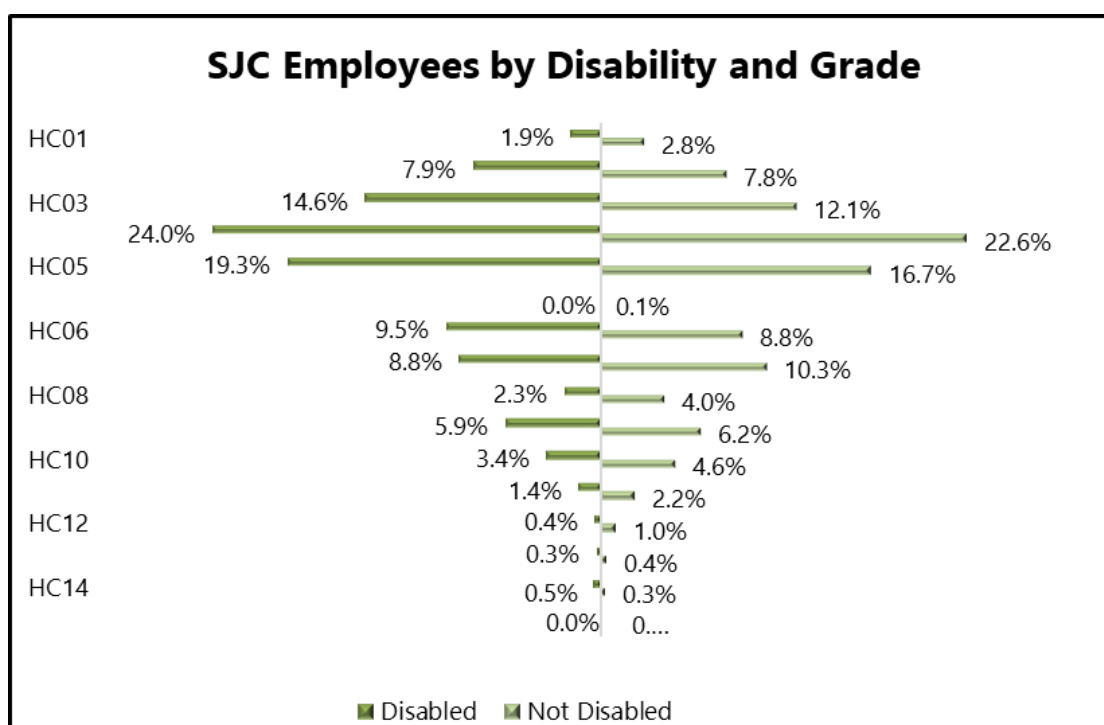
There are still notably more opportunities for part time employment and working in the lower SJC grades (HC01 – 06).

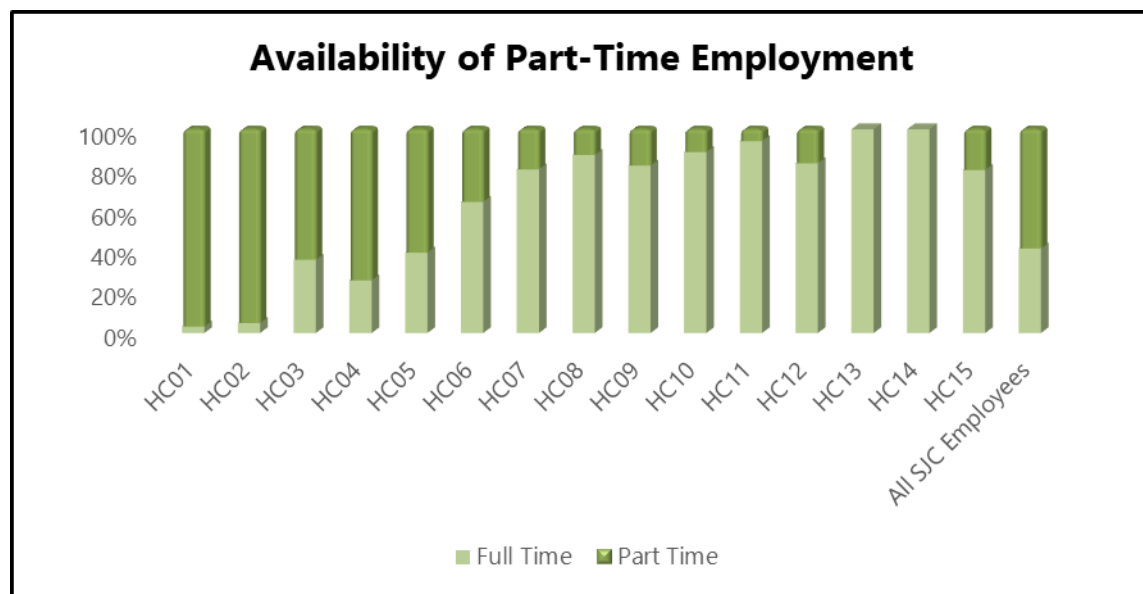
The Highland Council is committed to equality of opportunity and are proud to be recognised as a Disability Confident Employer. We are now working to achieve Disability Confident Leader status by Autumn 2023.

Our approach will allow new and existing staff members with a disability or long-term health condition across all grades to a tailored approach to managing their workplace environment and ensuring it is safe and accessible. The Disability passport also supports staff with a disability if they move to different roles in the organisation.

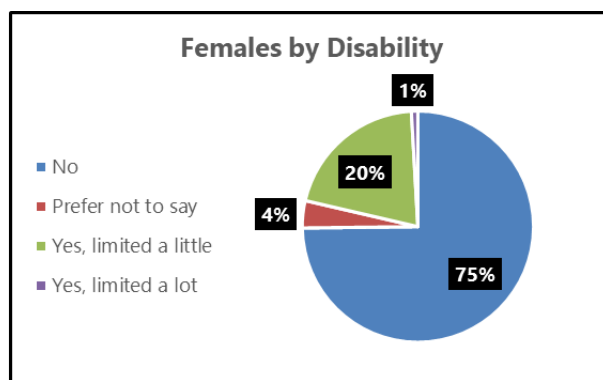


Occupational Segregation by Disability (Figure 9)

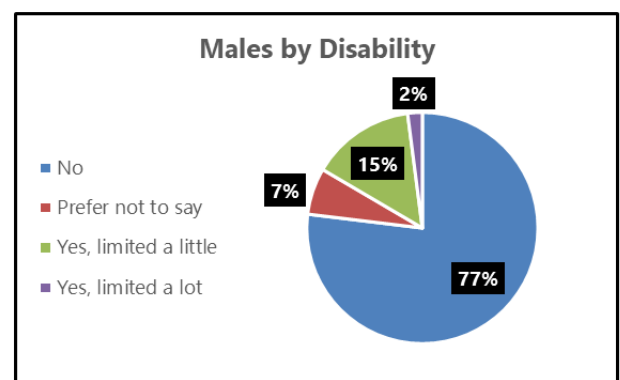


Occupational Segregation by Disability (Figure 10)*Availability of Part-Time employment – Disability (Figure 11)*

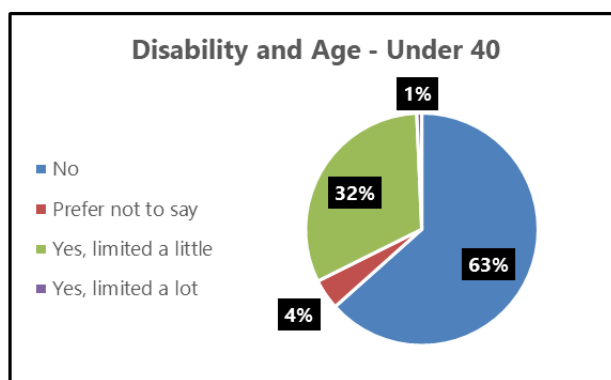
Intersectionality and disability



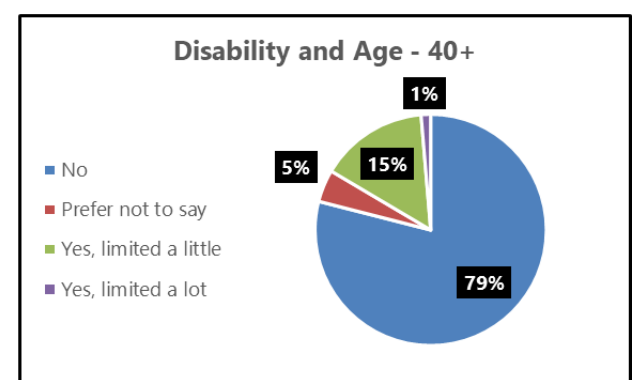
Females by Disability (Figure 12)



Males by Disability (Figure 13)



Age under 40 by Disability (Figure 14)



Age 40+ by Disability (Figure 15)

On examining the intersection of gender and disability we discovered that 5% more women than men report being limited a little in their daily activities.

On observing the intersection of age and disability we learnt that over twice as many employees under 40 than employees 40+ report being limited a little in their daily activities.

Race

The representation of race (ethnic groups) employed by the Council largely reflects the wider Highland population as publicised in the 2022 census results.

Ethnicity	Employees %	Highland Census 2022 %
White: White Scottish	77.1%	75.9%
White: Other White British	16.7%	16.2%
White: White Irish	0.7%	0.7%
White: Gypsy/ Traveller	0.0%	0.1%
White: White Polish	1.0%	1.9%
Other White	3.2%	2.6%
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	0.1%	0.8%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	0.6%	1.2%
African: African, African Scottish or African British	0.2%	0.2%
Caribbean or Black	0.1%	0.1%
Other ethnic group	0.2%	0.3%

The Distribution of All Employees by Ethnic Group in Comparison with the Highland Population (Figure 16)

Figure 16 represents just under half of the whole workforce. Our level of data has continued to improve with employees completing the equalities monitoring form via our systems self serve. Below are the ethnicity statistics for starters and leavers.

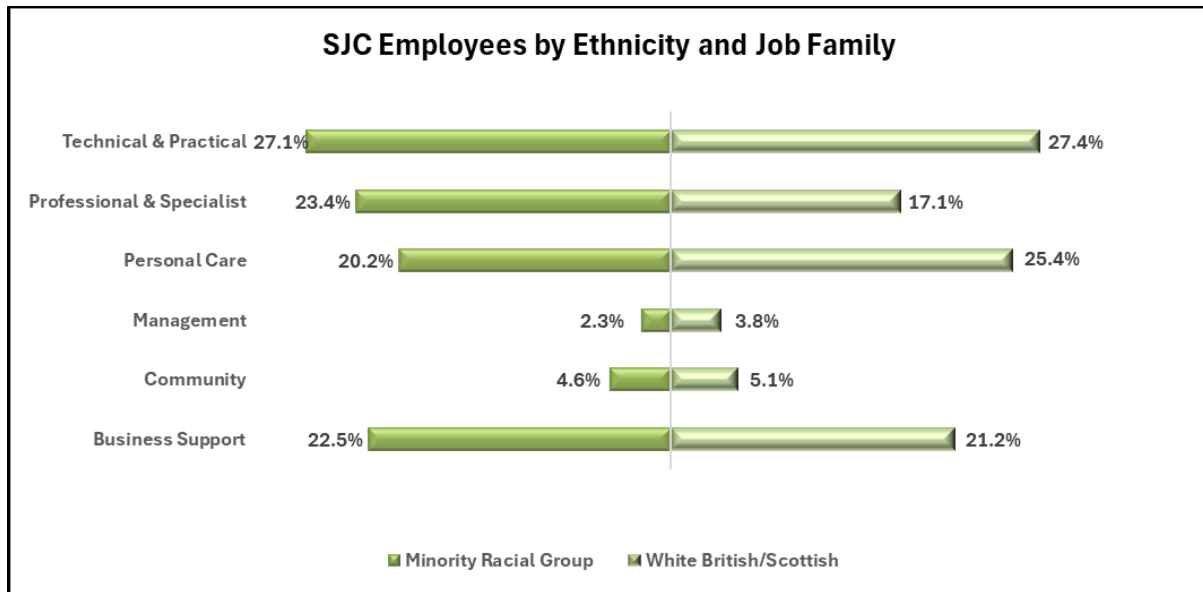
Ethnic Origin	Starters	Leavers
Black & Minority Ethnic Groups	18	4
White Groups	404	159
Unknown	1242	1040

The distribution of Employees Joining and Leaving the Council by Ethnicity (Figure 17)

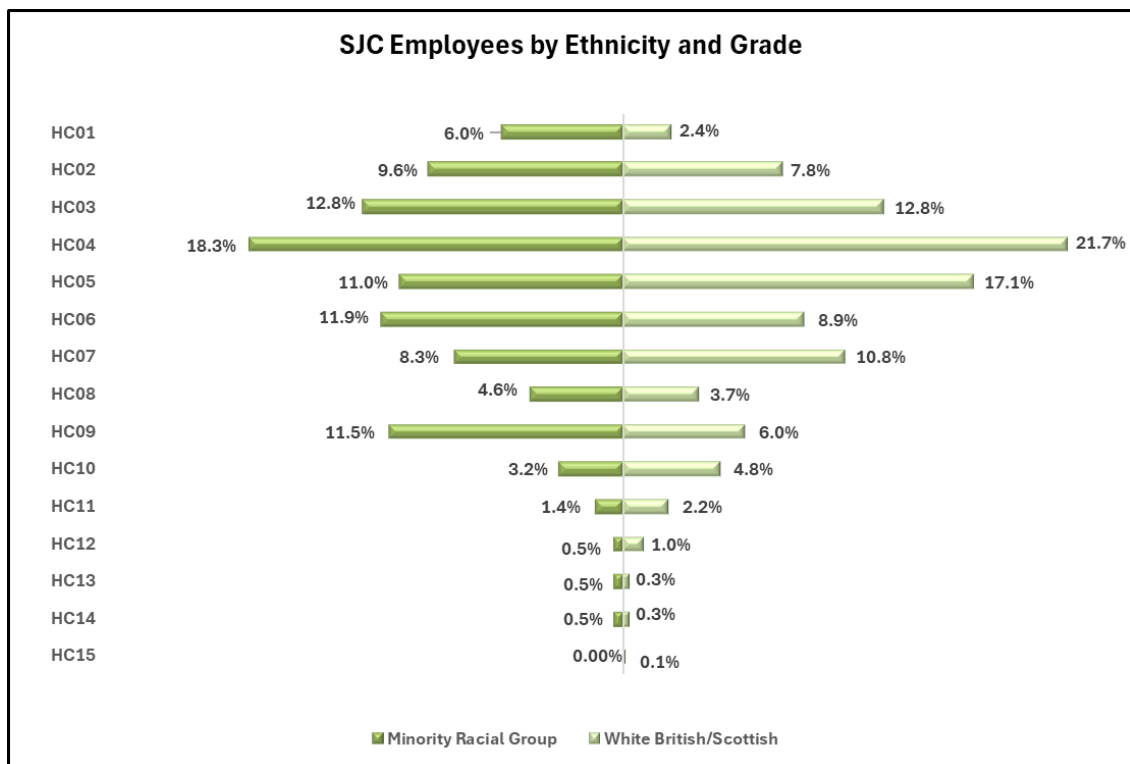
Training by Ethnic Origin	Applied		Received	
	No.	%	No.	%
Black & Minority Ethnic Groups	44	1%	44	1%
White Groups	3399	51%	3399	51%
Unknown	3285	49%	3285	49%

The distribution of training for All Employees by Ethnicity (Figure 18)

Occupational Segregation by Ethnicity

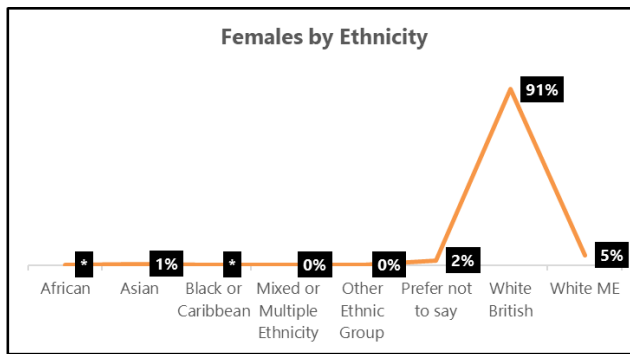


Occupational Segregation – Ethnicity and Job Family (Figure 19)

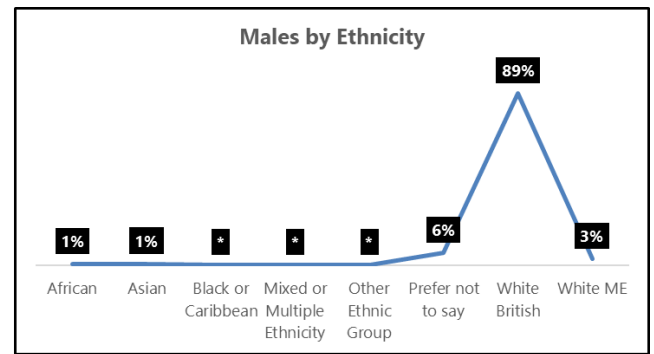


Occupational Segregation – Ethnicity and Grade (Figure 20)

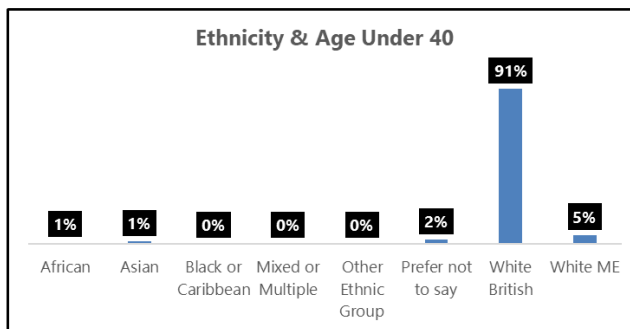
Intersectionality and Ethnicity



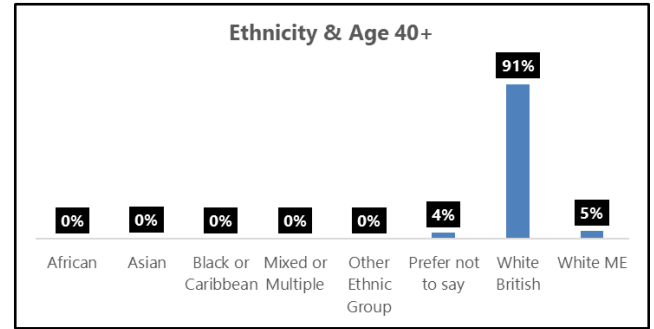
Females by Ethnicity (Figure 21)



Males by Ethnicity (Figure 22)



Age Under 40 by Ethnicity (Figure 23)



Age 40+ by Ethnicity (Figure 24)

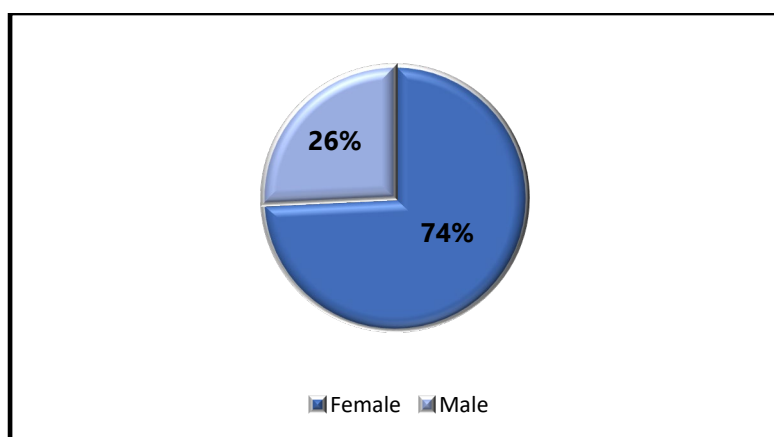
On examining the intersections of gender and age with ethnicity we discovered very little distinction

Sex (Gender)

Analysis of the data relating to sex (gender) shows a predominantly female workforce across the whole of the Council (74.1%). This is the case for both the SJC and teaching workforce.

All Employees

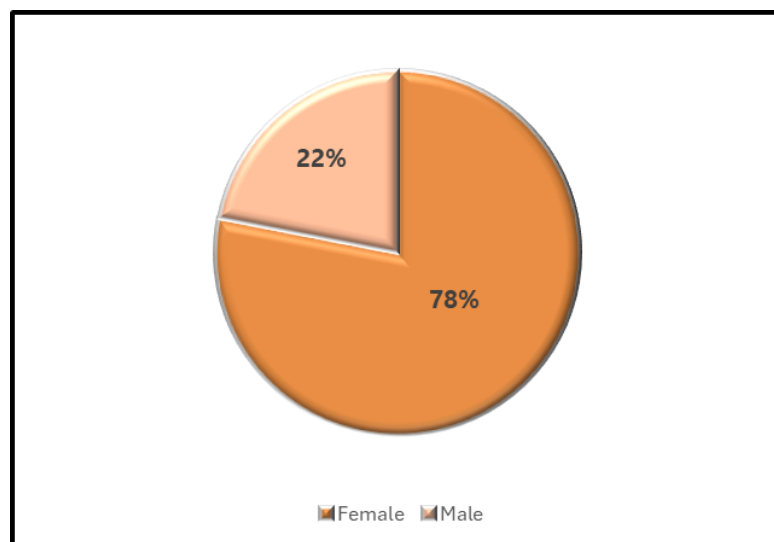
Sex	Female	Male	Total
No. of employees	8214	2850	11064



Distribution of All Employees by sex (Figure 25)

Teaching Employees

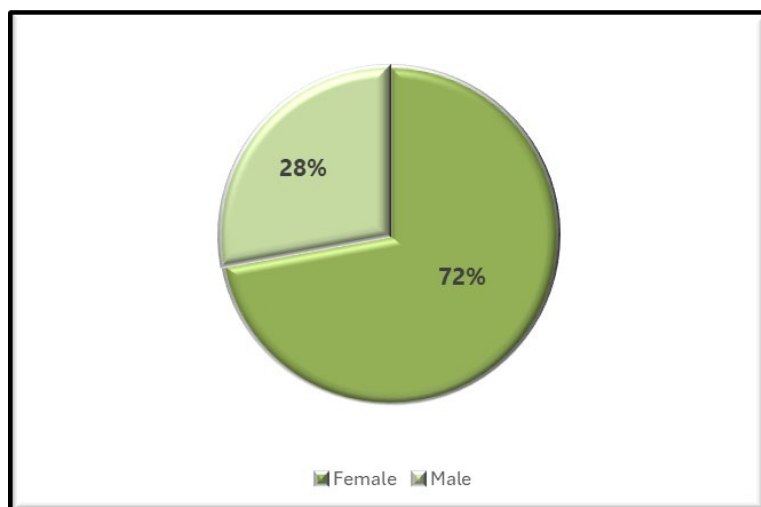
Sex	Female	Male	Total
No. of employees	2327	654	2981



Distribution of Teachers by Sex (Figure 26)

SJC Employees

Sex	Female	Male	Total
No. of employees	5638	2181	7819

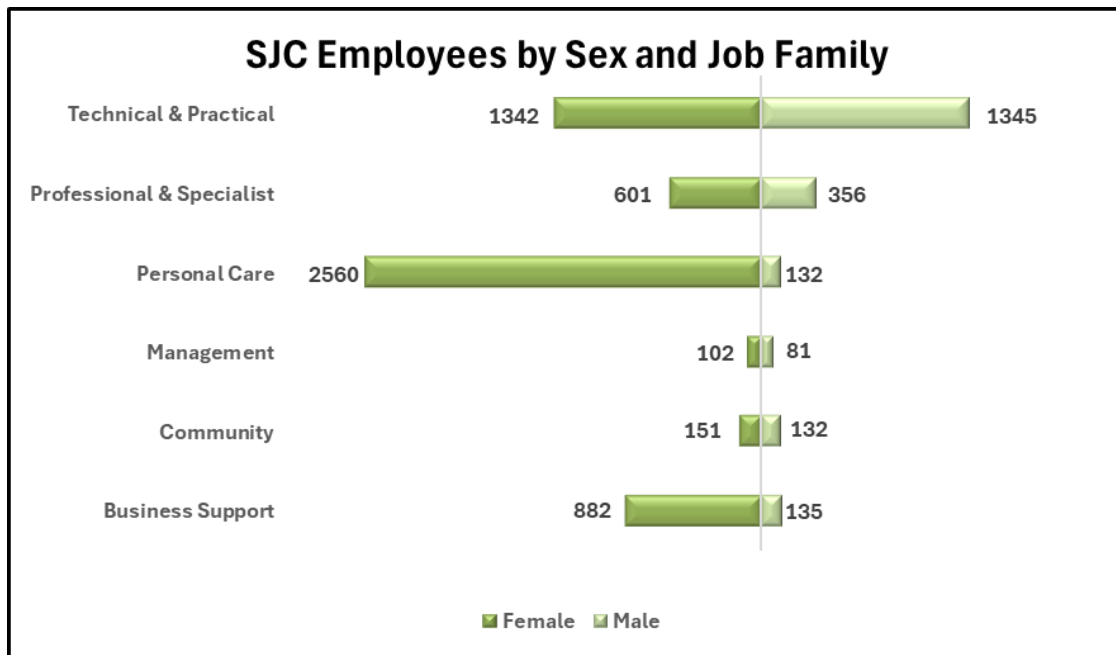


Distribution of Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Employees by Sex (Figure 27)

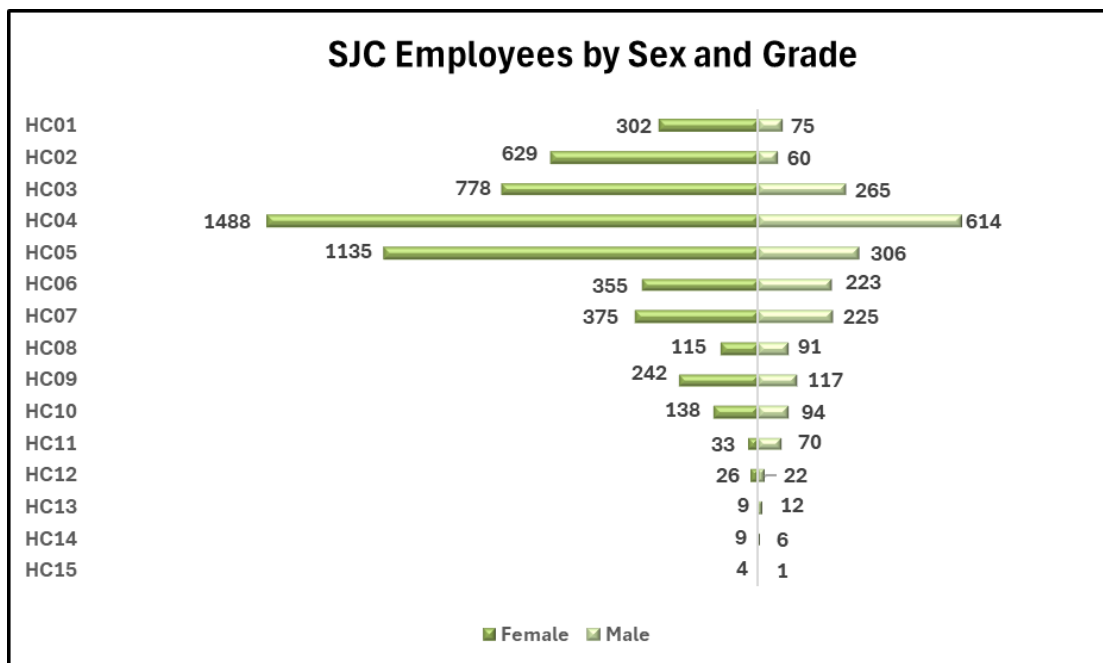
Occupational Segregation by Sex

In relation to occupational segregation, the pattern of male and female employment is varied. Male and female employees are found in similar ratios across the job roles within Community, Technical & Practical and Management. Female employees are significantly overrepresented in Personal Care, Business Support and Professional & Specialist roles.

Care must be taken in drawing conclusions from the Technical & Practical group as horizontal segregation continues to persist with males working predominantly in community works roles and females working predominantly in catering, caring, and cleaning roles.



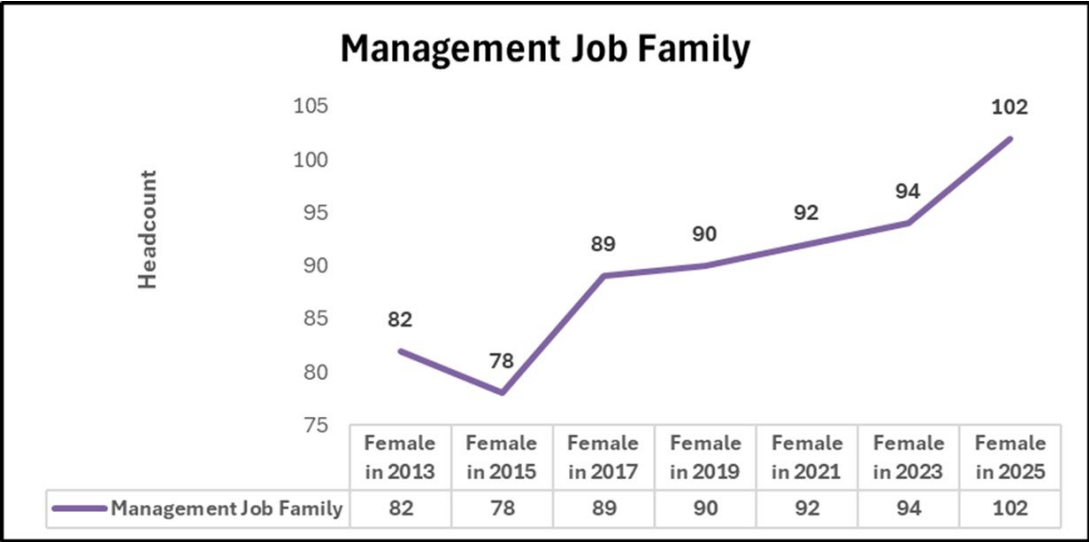
Distribution of Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Employees by Sex and Job Family (Figure 28)



Distribution of Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Employees by Sex and Grade (Figure 29)

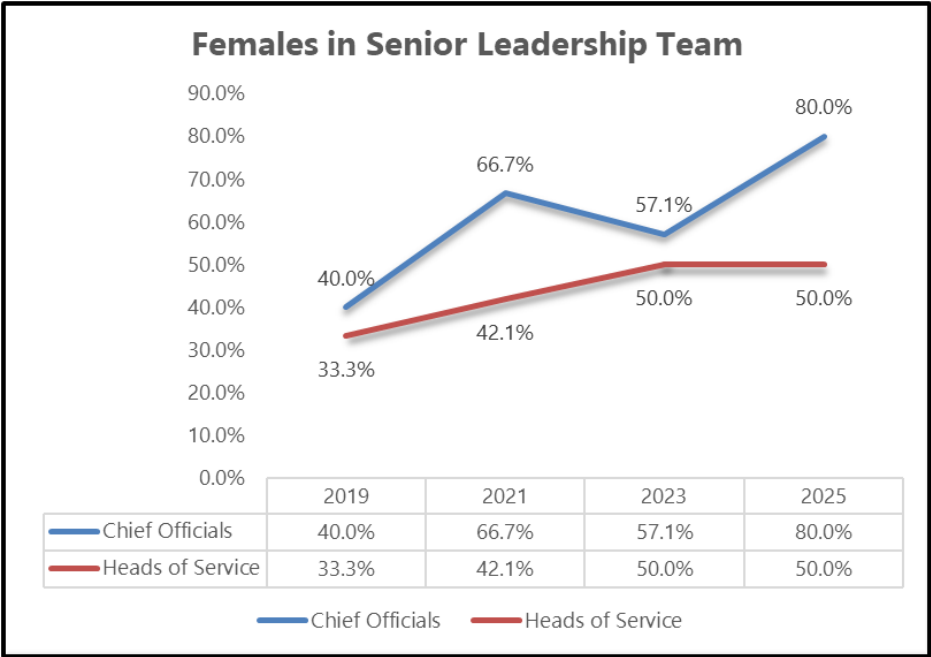
Females in Management

In 2025, 55.7% of the managers employed in SJC Management posts are women. The increase in the number of women in management over the years can be seen in the chart below.



Females in Management (Figure 30)

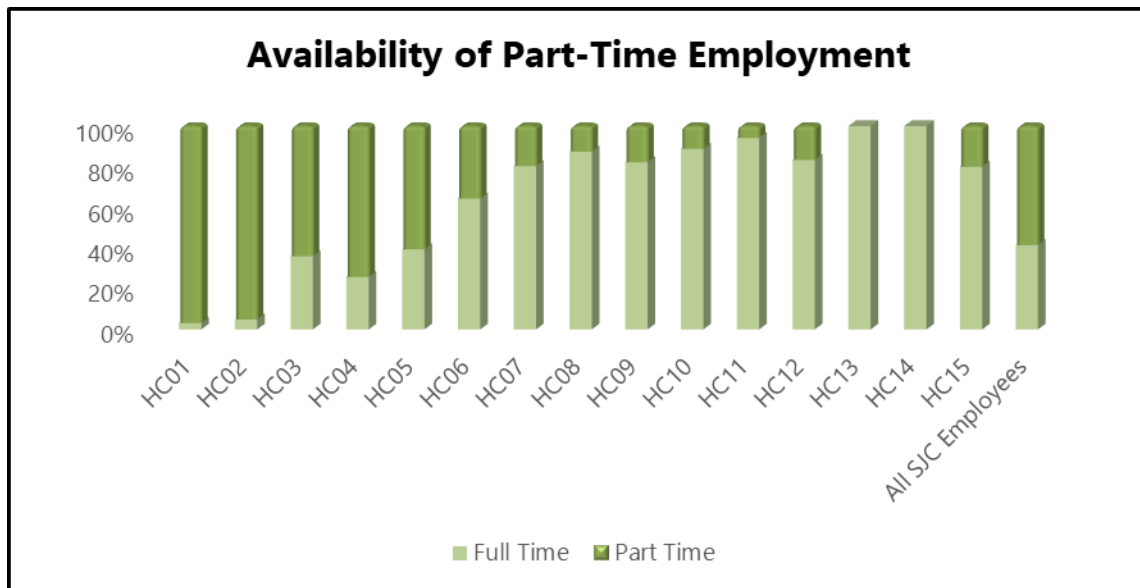
Females in Senior Leadership



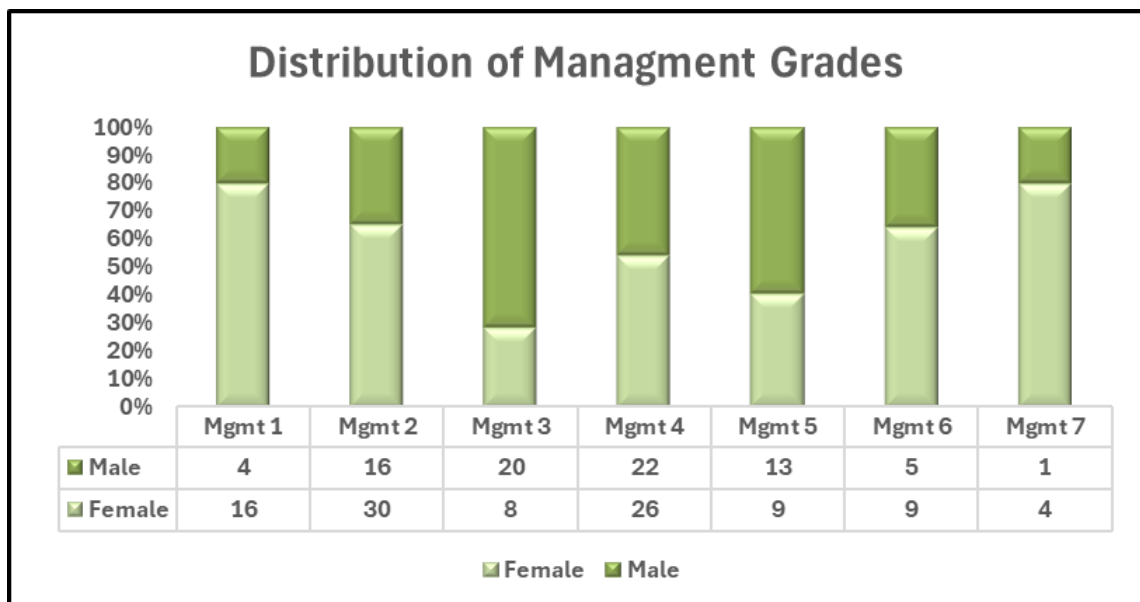
Females in Senior Leadership Team (Figure 31)

Numbers in Senior Leadership Team									
Chief Officials	2019	2021	2023	2025	Heads of Service	2019	2021	2023	2025
Female	2	6	4	7	Female	6	7	7	4
Male	3	3	3	7	Male	12	9	7	1
Total	5	9	7	14	Total	18	16	14	5

In 2025, 57.9% of the senior leadership team are women which is a 5.5% increase since 2023. There are still significantly more opportunities for part-time working in the lower SJC grades (HC01-06) Information and analysis of gender pay gaps in published separately.



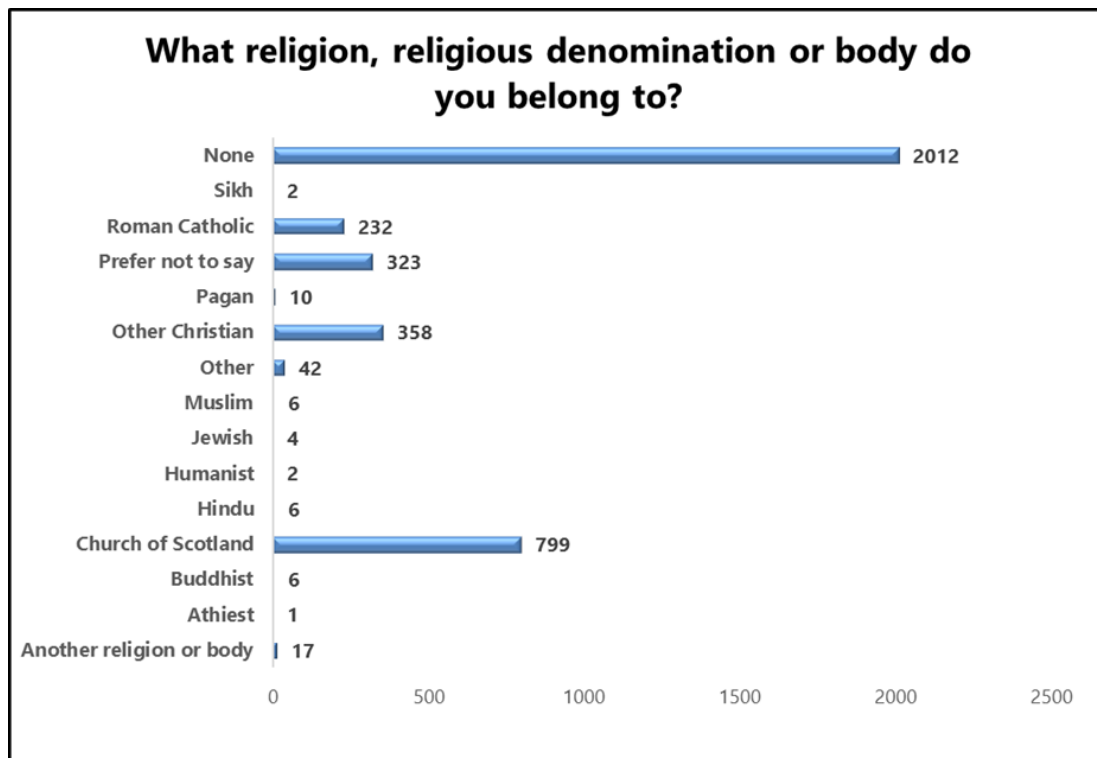
Availability of Part-Time Employment – Sex (Figure 32)



Distribution of Management Grades – Sex (Figure 33)

Religion or Belief

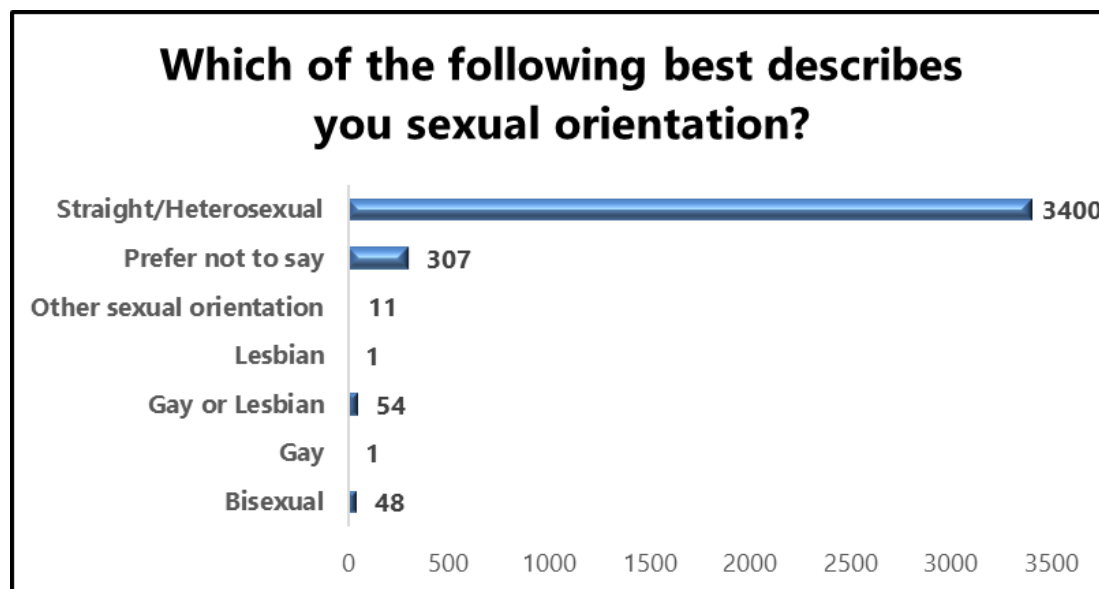
In 2023, we held data on religion or belief for less than 10% of the workforce. Now, with self serve functionality and promotion of the new equalities form that figure has increased to 35%. While this isn't representative of the whole Council, it serves as a valuable indicator. It also marks a significant improvement that will support the identification of future trends.



Distribution of Employees by Religion or Belief (Figure 34)

Sexual Orientation

In 2023, we held data on sexual orientation for less than 10% of the workforce. Now, with self serve functionality and promotion of the new equalities form that figure has increased to 35%. While this isn't representative of the whole Council, it serves as a valuable indicator. It also marks a significant improvement that will support the identification of future trends.



Distribution of Employees by Sexual Orientation (Figure 35)

Marriage or Civil Partnership

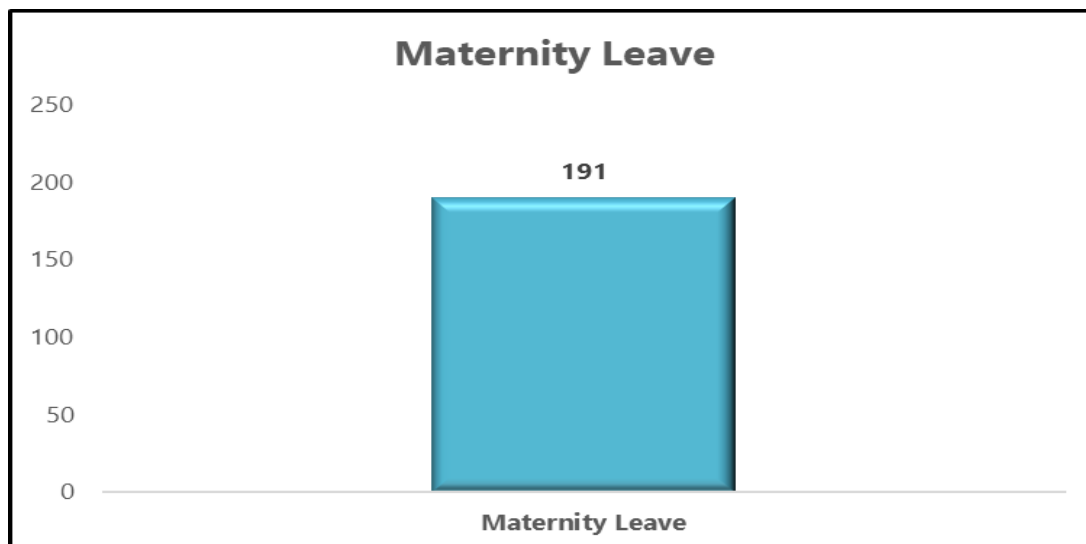
In 2023, we held data on marriage or civil partnership for less than 10% of the workforce. Now, with self serve functionality and promotion of the new equalities form that figure has increased to 32%. While this isn't representative of the whole Council, it serves as a valuable indicator. It also marks a significant improvement that will support the identification of future trends.



Distribution of Employees by Marriage or Civil Partnership (Figure 36)

Maternity and Pregnancy

In 2023, we were unable to report on Maternity leave, however our reporting functionality has now been upgraded which enables us to provide this information for employees for 2024-25. We are still unable to report on pregnancy specifically as this is not recorded within our reporting system, however our current systems capabilities continue to be reviewed to meet our reporting requirements.



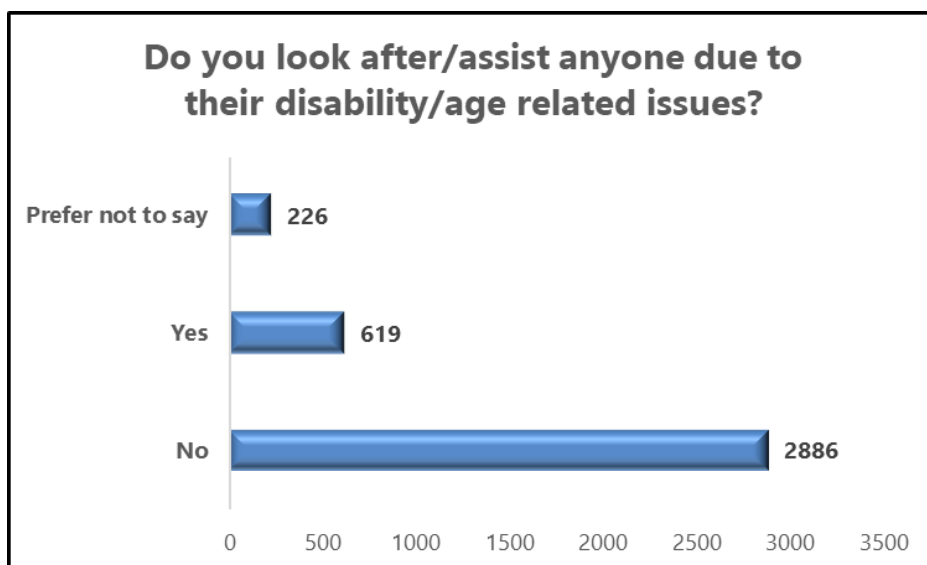
Transgender

In 2023, we held data on trans/trans history for less than 10% of the workforce. Now, with self serve functionality and promotion of the new equalities form that figure has increased to 34%. While this isn't representative of the whole Council, it serves as a valuable indicator. It also marks a significant improvement that will support the identification of future trends.



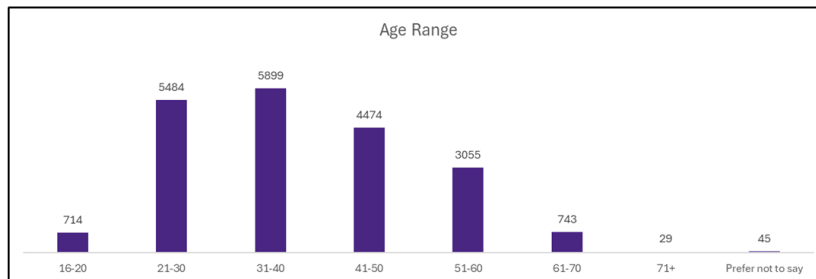
Caring Responsibilities

In 2023, we held data on caring responsibilities for less than 10% of the workforce. Now, with self serve functionality and promotion of the new equalities form that figure has increased to 34%. While this isn't representative of the whole Council, it serves as a valuable indicator. It also marks a significant improvement that will support the identification of future trends.

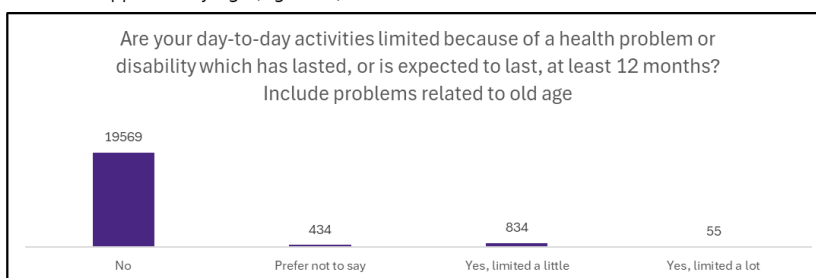
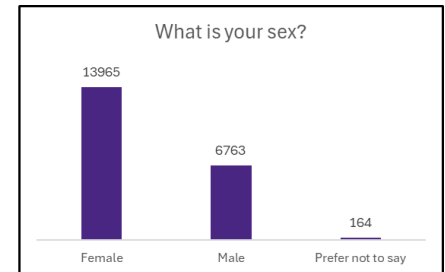


Recruitment

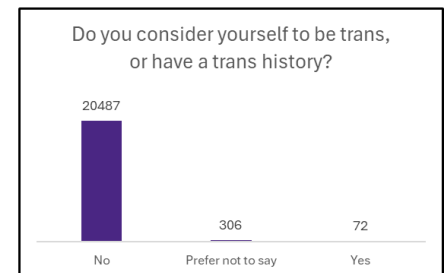
Below are the equalities statistics from all shortlisted applicants within our recruitment system in 2024-25. This data closely aligns with both our data and the findings from the census 2022 on the wider Highland community.



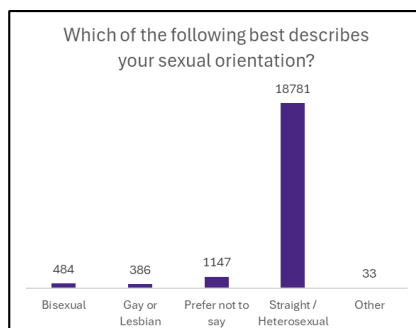
Shortlisted applicants by Age (Figure 40)



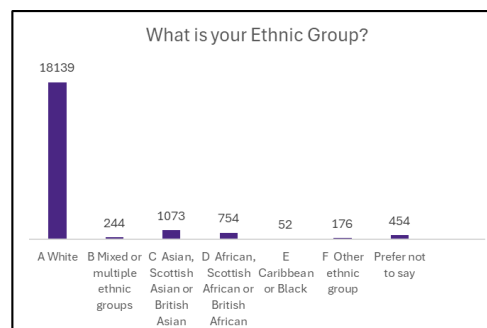
Shortlisted applicants by disability (Figure 42)



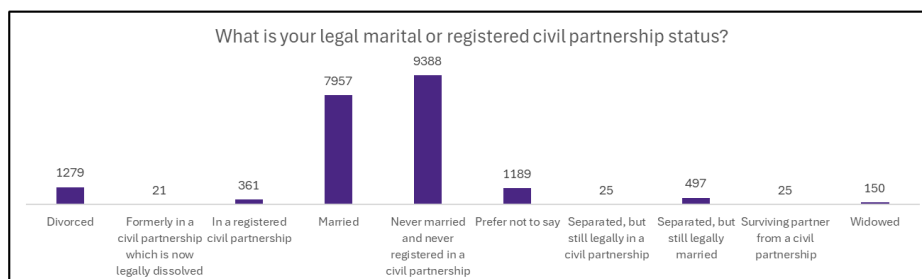
Shortlisted applicants by trans (Figure 43)



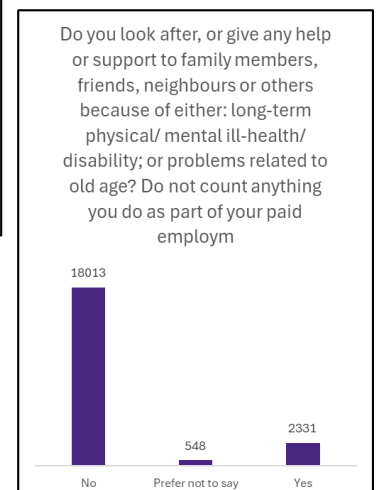
Shortlisted applicants by sexual orientation (Figure 44)



Shortlisted applicants by ethnic group (Figure 45)



Shortlisted applicants by marriage or civil partnership (Figure 46)



Shortlisted applicants by caring responsibilities (Figure 47)

2.2 Gender Pay Gap 2024

Background

Specific duties introduced in Scotland in 2012 by Regulations require the Council to publish information on the Council's equal pay gap.

Guidance on meeting the requirements of the various duties is provided by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and supported by *Close the Gap*. *Close the Gap* is an organisation, funded by the Scottish Government, working in partnership with the EHRC and the Scottish Trades Union Congress to guide and assist employers. All pay gap calculations are based on their guidance.

An organisation's gender pay gap is the difference between the average male and female pay rates. It is calculated by dividing the average female hourly pay rate by the average male hourly pay rate. The full-time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly pay rate of female employees who work full time and male employees who work full time. The part time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly pay rate of female employees who work part time and male employees who work full-time.

The Council is required to publish the gender pay gap between male and female employees. It is also required to publish this data separately on employees in Education (Teaching employees) The EHRC and *Close the Gap* also strongly advise publishing separate full time and part time gender pay gaps. It is considered that any pay gap of 5% or more is considered significant and in need on further analysis.

Highland Council Gender Pay Gap - Overview

2024	Combined Gap	Full Time Gap	Part Time Gap
All Employees	+3.2%	-17.4%	+18.9%
Non-Teaching Employees	+8.4%	-9.6%	+18.9%
Teaching Employees	+5.0%	+4.8%	+10.9%
SJC* Employees	+9.5%	-8.5%	+19.5%

**Scottish Joint Council (HC01 to HC15)*

Note: A positive figure denotes a gap to the advantage of male employees. A negative figure denotes a gap to the advantage of female employees.

Average Hourly Rates 2024	Combined Gap		Full Time Gap		Part Time Gap	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
All Employees	£20.71	£20.04	£21.19	£24.88	£18.70	£17.18
Non-Teaching Employees	£17.27	£15.82	£17.77	£19.47	£15.04	£14.41
Teaching Employees	£31.65	£30.08	£32.43	£30.88	£28.77	£28.90
SJC* Employees	£17.13	£15.50	£17.61	£19.12	£14.96	£14.18

* Scottish Joint Council (HC01 to HC15)

Note: A positive figure denotes a gap to the advantage of male employees. A negative figure denotes a gap to the advantage of female employees.

Gender Pay Gap - Analysis

The 2023 Gender Pay Gap analysis identified the following equal Pay Gaps:

2023	Combined Gap	Full Time Gap	Part Time Gap
All Employees	+4.5%	-15.8%	+20.8%
Non-Teaching Employees	+9.3%	-9.3%	+20.6%
Teaching Employees	+4.9%	+4.3%	+11.2%
SJC* Employees	+10.6%	-8.2%	+21.5%

Scottish Joint Council (HC01 to HC15)

Note: A positive figure denotes a gap to the advantage of male employees. A negative figure denotes a gap to the advantage of female employees.

Analysis of this data suggested that:

- The Teacher pay and grading structure is robust and supports equal pay.
- The Scottish Local Government Living Wage (SLGLW) has risen over recent years, which created compression in the lower grades within the Council's Pay & Grading Structure. The Council has now undertaken a pay modelling exercise to address this issue.
- Significant workforce gender segregation in SJC Job Families (Business Support, Personal Care, Technical and Practical), Craft and Teaching posts correspond with significant part time pay gaps.

- Lower availability of part time working in SJC grades HC6 and above corresponds with a significant SJC part time pay gap.
- Lower availability of part time working in promoted teaching grades corresponds with a Teaching part time pay gap.

Previous reports found that the following issues could contribute and impact the pay gaps.

- Vertical gender segregation (disproportionately low number of women in senior posts) in Teaching posts and in SJC Business Support and Management posts.
- Horizontal gender segregation in teaching posts (disproportionately low number of women Head Teachers in Secondary Schools).
- Lower uptake of part time working opportunities in senior teaching posts and in SJC posts graded HC06 and above.
- Horizontal gender segregation (males in Community Works and females in Catering, Cleaning and Caring posts) within Technical & Practical posts.

A number of actions continue to be taken to address gender segregation and the availability of part time work in senior grades. For example:

- Female role models in male dominated job groups are encouraged within the structure.
- Where service delivery allows, we have various policies in place to support employees achieve a work life balance. These include family friendly staff policies, flexible working opportunities and hybrid working.
- Job Descriptions and Person Specifications continue to be monitored and reviewed to ensure that they contain no gender bias.
- Services have reviewed workplace facilities to ensure that both genders are adequately provided for.
- Significant areas of gender segregation are monitored and reviewed to identify and address any barriers to employment.
- Strategic workforce planning should help address and further promote flexible working arrangements that support women to progress their careers.

- The Council is participating in the “Bronze” award of the programme run by Close the Gap (working towards Equally Safe at Work accreditation). Evidence required for this award includes a section on gender-disaggregated data gathering, aligned to the Equality & Human Rights Commission requirements.
- Accreditation as a Living Wage Employer since 2019.

These actions demonstrate a general improvement in the Highland Council's gender equal pay gaps since 2023, notably the combined gap for all employees has reduced from 4.5% to 3.2%.

The 2024 gaps are as follows:

2024	Combined Gap	Full Time Gap	Part Time Gap
All Employees	+3.2%	-17.4%	+18.9%
Non-Teaching Employees	+8.4%	-9.6%	+18.9%
Teaching Employees	+5.0%	+4.8%	+10.9%
SJC* Employees	+9.5%	-8.5%	+19.5%

*Scottish Joint Council (HC01 to HC15)

Note: No pay gap would be shown as zero, A positive figure denotes a gap to the advantage of male employees. A negative figure denotes a gap to the advantage of female employees.

Improvements in these pay gaps over the period 2023-2024 are as follows:



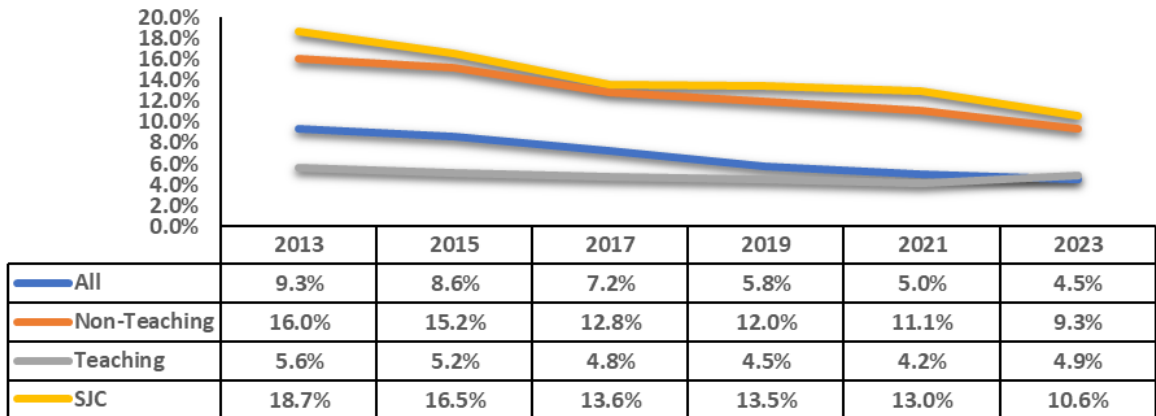
* Scottish Joint Council (HC01 to HC15) *Note: A positive figure denotes a gap to the advantage of male employees. A negative figure denotes a gap to the advantage of female employees.*

These pay gaps demonstrate that pay gaps have improved across all groups in 2024.

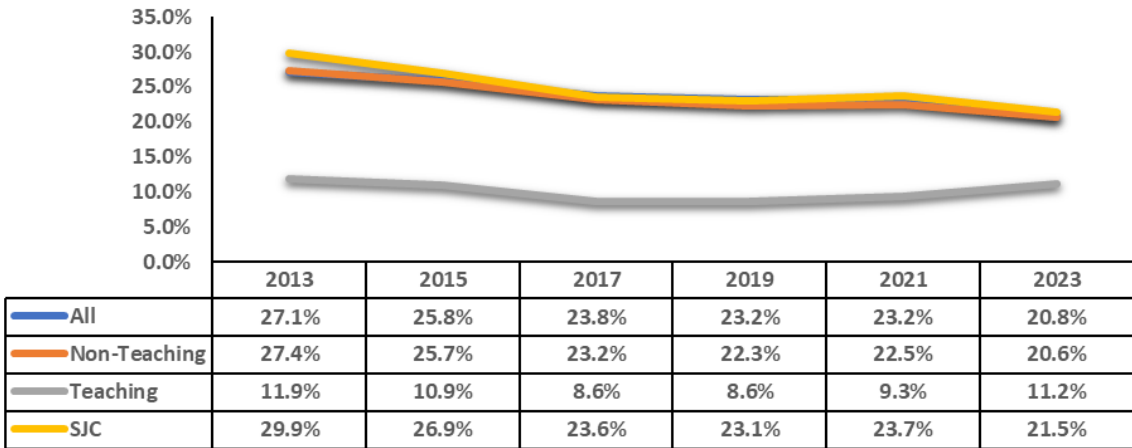
The exception to this is for teaching employees where there has been a minor shift to the advantage of male employees in the combined and full-time gaps. This may be attributed to that fact that SJC pay awards in recent years have been differentiated by grade (flat rates applied to lower grades and percentage uplifts applied to higher grades), whereas teachers' pay awards were based on percentage uplifts only.

Trends in the Council's gender pay gaps since they were first recorded in 2013 are set out below.

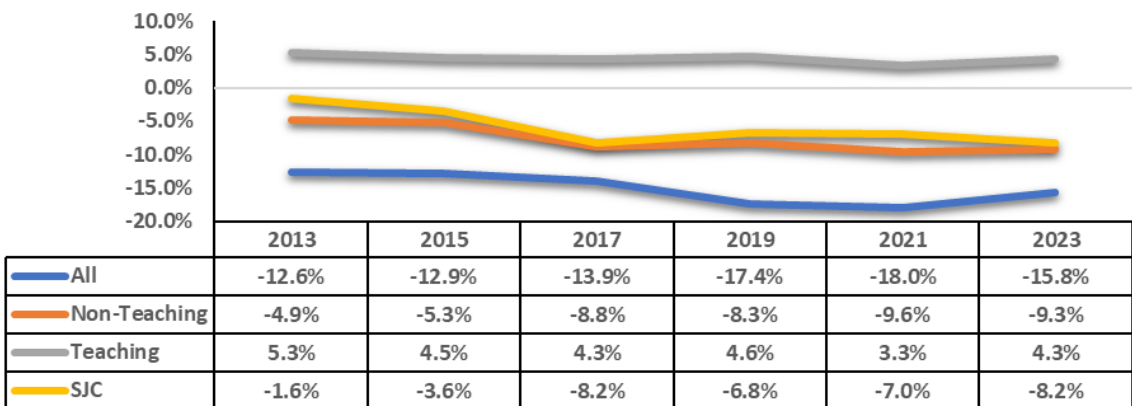
Combined Pay Gap Trend



Part Time Pay Gap Trend



Full Time Pay Gap Trend



The Council's pay gaps are interesting in that the full time pay gaps generally benefit women. The part time pay gaps for all employees are more in line with what would be expected given the composition of our workforce. This marked difference between the full time and part time gaps suggests that one of the underlying reasons for the combined gap is the greater availability of part time and term time work in the lower pay grades.

Median Pay Gap

The median pay gap is calculated and based on all employees

2024 Median Pay Gap	Female	Male	Gap
Combined Gap	£15.78	£17.23	+8.4%
Full Time Gap	£24.49	£17.69	-38.4%
Part Time Gap	£14.25	£15.15	+5.9%

Highland Council do not pay bonus at all. Allowances are based on hourly rates already analysed in the hourly pay gaps.

The proportion of men and women in each pay quartile is as follows:

Quartile	Male	Female
Q1	25.2%	74.8%
Q2	31.2%	68.8%
Q3	23.5%	76.5%
Q4	23.0%	77.0%

Next Steps

When reviewing our pay gap trends over the years, we can see significant improvements since the first Equal Pay Report in 2013.

As expected, the Councils pay gaps have continued to improve in 2024. One of the factors contributing to the improved pay gap is the pay modelling exercise we undertook, alongside the other actions outlined in section 2.4. When reviewing our pay gap trends over the years, we can also see significant improvements since the first Equal Pay Report in 2013.

It is now necessary to maintain this momentum. This will be particularly important going forward as the gaps could be impacted by the current cost of living crisis and the continued evolving workforce composition.

A review of strategic workforce planning is ongoing with recommended actions driving change in how the organisation designs and develops roles to meet future service requirements. The distribution of the workforce is extensive, with a significant percentage of employees working out with the Council's Inverness Headquarters.

Hybrid and Remote ways of working have evolved and increased thus providing opportunities for flexibility with the potential to effect gender segregation within roles.

Ongoing monitoring of our pay structure, policies and recruitment processes should continue to have a positive impact on future gender pay gap reporting.

Equal Pay Statement 2022-2026

The Highland Council is committed to the principle of equal pay for all its employees and aims to identify and eliminate any bias in its pay systems relating to any of the protected characteristics defined in the Equalities Act 2010.

The Council recognises the specific duty relating to gender, disability and ethnicity.

It is in the interest of the Council to ensure that it has fair and just pay systems. It is important that employees have confidence in the process of eliminating bias and the Council is committed to achieving this through consultation with employees and the recognised trade unions.

The Council believes that in eliminating bias in its pay systems, it is sending a positive message to its employees and the Highland community. It makes good business sense to have fair and transparent reward systems and it also helps the Council to control costs.

The Council recognises that occupational segregation in the workforce may have a negative effect on equal pay gaps. The Council is committed to monitoring and analysing areas of occupational segregation and implementing actions to address these.

Previous analysis of pay data suggests that the greater availability of part time work in senior grades could have a positive impact on pay gaps. The Council is committed to taking action to achieve this.

Actions undertaken by the Council are:

- Monitor gender pay gaps, occupational segregation and the availability of part time and flexible working arrangements.
- Identify and eliminate any unfair, unjust or unlawful practices that impact on pay and take appropriate remedial action.
- Fully integrated the Real Living Wage following recent government guidance for Public Sector resulting in a revised pay and grading model.

The Council will:

1. Operate a pay strategy for Scottish Joint Council (SJC) employees that ensures equal pay for work of equal value and single status terms and conditions of employment.
2. Apply the agreed job sizing arrangements for the grades and pay of teachers.
3. Operate a Flexible and Agile Working Policy that opens opportunities to all employees across the pay grades.
4. Appoint on merit, properly assessing the abilities of candidates for recruitment and promotion.
5. Take positive action to support employees within underrepresented groups where occupational segregation exists.
6. Provide training and development to support employees to develop their careers where barriers may exist.
7. Develop a culture that supports employees to achieve their full potential.
8. Respond to grievances and complaints to the Council on equal pay related issues.
9. Consult and plan actions in line with Engagement and Partnership Framework.
10. Review progress regularly and in accordance with the publication requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

Section 3 Equality Outcomes

3.1 Progress with Equality Outcomes between 2023-2025

Outcomes set for 2021-2025 are the Council's third set of Equality Outcomes following a review in 2021. The tables that follow set out each outcome and the progress towards achieving them in the period 2023 - 2025. The previous progress report can be found at the link - [https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/20765/equality - mainstreaming and outcomes report 2017-19](https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/20765/equality%20-%20mainstreaming%20and%20outcomes%20report%202017-19)

Some outcomes are shared with other key local partners. These are identified along with which protected characteristic they relate to and which of the three elements of the public sector duty apply.

Equality Outcome 1: A diverse workforce that reflects our community	
Priority Activity 1: Workforce & Leadership Lead Service: HR	
Proposed Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the demographic of our community in relation to targeting opportunities to address underrepresented groups Improving equalities data monitoring & analysis to inform focused HR activity Supporting a culture of inclusion at every level of the organisation Re-engage with Close The Gap during October to plan working towards Equally Safe at Work accreditation from Jan 2022. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following updating systems to gather equality data during Spring 2023, there have been regular staff communications outlining the importance of recording monitoring data and encouraging staff to check/update this information. This has resulted in improved data collection and reporting capacity. A new form enabling staff to report third party sexual harassment is currently being developed on the council's Assure system. This will enable monitoring and reporting of instances of third-party harassment. A case study on the Sexual Harassment Preventative Duty is included in the report. A number of activities have been initiated which directly and indirectly support a culture of inclusion throughout the organisation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health Representatives (MHR) – MHRs continue to play a pivotal role and are supported with appropriate training. A new dedicated email is now in place as an alternative means of staff contact. In addition, a new MH helpline is now available, a case study is included in the main report.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Neurodiversity – an officer and elected member working group was formed during March 25 to consider a new Neurodiversity Equality Outcome. Following this, a Neurodiversity training module is now live and mandatory for all staff. ○ Equality & Diversity Training - a Highland Council specific course is now available and mandatory for all staff. ○ Women’s Health Guidance – this guidance supports an inclusive working culture by removing any stigma and taboos surrounding women’s health at work. This guidance will help to create an environment where employees are able to talk about their health and practical needs. ○ Statement on commitment to Fair Work (agreed March 25) - The Fair Work Convention's Framework defines Fair Work as work that offers effective voice, fulfilment, opportunity, respect and security. These dimensions should be visible in the attitudes, behaviours, culture, policies and practices within an organisation, demonstrating the value placed on fair work and equal opportunity in work. ○ New Gender Based Violence Policy (approved September 23) – the council is committed to supporting affected employees to stay in work, feel safe and supported, and have access to the support services they require. The council's zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence in all its forms, is evidenced through policy development, guidance, training, communication, by having an effective reporting mechanism, and dealing appropriately with any employees found to be perpetrating gender-based violence. ○ Wellbeing Survey – an update is included in the main report ○ Talent Strategy and action plan (approved March 25) - supports delivery of the People Strategy and the organisation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build a high-performing and agile workforce • create meaningful growth opportunities for our employees • embrace diversity and inclusion • support an ambitious, sustainable and connected culture across the organisation • become the employer of choice in Scotland
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CEX Our Future Highland Roadshows – a programme of in person roadshows taking place across Highland (Nov 24 - Jun 25). All staff invited to attend. ○ Disability Confident (leader) accreditation (October 23) - the council has been awarded the highest accreditation in recognition of our commitment to recruiting and retaining staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions. ○ Equally Safe at Work (Development) accreditation (December 23) – the council will be working toward bronze level accreditation from October 25. ○ Carer Positive policy (updated May 24) - supports employees by providing unpaid care to balance work, home and caring commitments, enabling employees to remain in work by utilising the Carer Positive Passport and Carer Positive Leave. In addition to statutory unpaid carer's leave, Highland Council employees who are unpaid carers may be able to benefit from up to 5 days paid Carer Positive Leave per year (pro-rata).
Priority Activity 2: Employability Lead Service: Infrastructure & Environment	
Proposed Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people who are about to transition from school or who have left school and are not engaged in learning or in work, to prepare for the world of work (a key client group are care experienced young people) • Adults who face multiple barriers which stop them from preparing for, accessing and sustaining employment • Parental Employability Support including support for disabled parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As well as being a member of the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP), Highland Council has lead accountable body status in relation to the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind funding on behalf of the HEP. • The Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) was re-established in 2021. It is a multi-agency approach to ensure that partners work collaboratively to deliver employability services across the area served by Highland Council. Through collective leadership, partners aim to develop shared objectives to service design which addresses the need of both clients and employers and embraces greater integration and alignment of resources to simplify and maximise opportunities. • The aim of the HEP is to work with individuals and employers to raise as many Highland residents as possible out of poverty through sustainable and fair work; supporting those who face multiple barriers into employment and enabling progression out of poverty for those who are already in work.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Firm Employability Support for Looked After and Accommodated and Care Experienced Young People Develop opportunities for supported businesses (providing jobs for individuals with disabilities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In October 2024 the HEP launched the Work. Life. Highland brand including the website www.worklifehighland.co.uk. The purpose of the Work. Life. Highland website is to provide a simple and clear “front door” point of entry to encourage potential clients and employers to get in touch and find out more about the help and support on offer.
Priority Activity 3: Improving the prospects for resettled Syrian families Lead Service: Infrastructure & Environment	
Proposed Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the capacity of local employability case workers to support resettled families into the labour market Support work with local employers to improve readiness to employ resettled refugees Profile skills of resettled individuals and improve job readiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highland Council Employability team has supported several Syrian clients in their journey towards employment, for example through the public sector Paid Placement scheme. As well as supporting Syrian families, over the last 2 years the team has supported clients from several countries including Afghanistan and the Ukraine who have re-settled in the Highlands. Free provision of English language learning for economic migrants/refugees and Asylum seekers. The Syrian scheme ended in October 2024. The Resettlement Team are currently supporting the Afghan Resettlement Programme and some Ukrainians, but this has reduced since the peak of arrivals in 2022.
Equality Outcome 2: Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making	
Priority Activity 1: Improved engagement and involvement for people with protected characteristics Lead Service: Communities & Place	
Proposed Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the Engagement Framework to encourage inclusive approaches to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During recent Place Planning work, drop in events have been provided in a variety of locations, in both towns and villages. Drop-in times have provided a choice during the day and evenings. Links with Access panels and other groups have also helped support inclusive engagement.

<p>engagement with equality groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use learning through the Engagement Framework to understand needs of particular groups for recovery work • Improve consideration of advancing equality and tackling inequality in grant awards to encourage positive impacts, eg Participatory Budgeting, Ward Funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online and virtual opportunities for engagement were also used to allow full involvement from individuals who may otherwise have been disadvantaged by nature of their location, availability, and cost of town transport travel. Co-location with other engagement events has also reduced the need for individuals to attend multiple events. We have also sought to use venues where people already gather. • Highland Council maintains comprehensive youth participation structures including, local youth forums, Highland Youth Parliament, The Highland Youth Convenor and full participation in the Scottish Youth Parliament. All these mechanisms support voice and influence of young people on issues that matter to them. These include issue-based rights work relating to both protected and unprotected characteristics. Grant awards can also be targeted at priorities from Area Place Plans, which recognise areas of deprivation and inequalities.
<p>Priority Activity 2: Improved experiences for disabled people in accessing Council services Lead Service: Communities & Place</p>	
<p>Propose Actions 2021:</p>	<p>2023-25 Update:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up the Inclusion Scotland 2021 survey and event and work with partners (Inclusion Scotland and NHS Highland) to arrange further dialogue with disabled people and relevant services / partners on the priority themes of the survey • Identify actions as a result of the above. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The customer experience strategy aims to ensure that customers are at the heart of the process and can access Highland Council Services in the way that suits them best, whether that is online, by phone or by accessing one of our Service Points. • To empower customers to self-serve online the website is currently being reviewed to make it more accessible.
<p>Priority Activity 3: Improving the lives of Highland's Gypsy/Travellers Lead Service: Housing & Property</p>	
<p>Proposed Actions 2021:</p>	<p>2023-25 Update:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore with other key Council services such as education, and Partners including Health, how we can further improve equal access to services for Gypsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gypsy Travellers Improving Lives Delivery Group has brought together representatives from key stakeholder THC and partner services – with representative organisations feeding into discussions. Officers have been exploring issues and looking at potential ways their service can contribute actions and / or driving forward activities.

<p>/Travellers in line with the aims of the national action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively work with residents on Highland's four Gypsy/Traveller residential sites and delivering works identified by them Ongoing involvement in national activities around Negotiated Stopping approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New homes provided, and more being built, in Inverness. Design informed by residents. Works being progressed at two of Highland's pitch sites to meet quality standards. Highland Council was one of 6 non NS pilot authorities feeding into national research. Our approach to working with roadside encampments was noted to be in line with the principles and aims of the NS approach.
<p>Equality Outcome 3: In Highland, people from identified groups feel respected and equally safe from harm Lead Service: Health & Social Care</p>	
<p>Priority Activity 1: Violence Against Women & Girls Lead Service: Health & Social Care</p>	
<p>Priority Actions 2021:</p>	<p>2023-25 Update:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a refreshed set of priorities and measures for Highland VAW Partnership Strategy. Develop 2021-24 VAWP action plan Use Covid-19 related data and partner information to inform the local strategy and delivery of the action plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HVAWP's new Strategic plan for 24-27 has been finalised which links into the refreshed Equally Safe Strategy at a local level as well as the Istanbul Convention and the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan. HVAWP have developed their new website and social media streams to provide proactive engagement and communications with local communities and organisations to increase people's awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of VAWG, and the role they can play in tackling it. HVAWP have been working throughout the year in partnership with Public Health Intelligence to research a wide range of data sources to develop regular data evidence to inform strategic decision making and monitor progress. HVAWP work with partners at High Life Highland, UHI across the Highlands, schools and education colleagues to deliver interventions to raise young people's understanding and awareness of VAWG and the importance of positive, healthy relationships. The Highland Council has taken part in the Equally Safe at Work pilot during the past few years and as such, their policies, procedures and support for employees experiencing VAWG have all been recently reviewed and passed external scrutiny. Public Sector staff who come into contact with members of the public have been offered/have received training in how to identify and respond to women and children

	<p>affected by VAWG. In particular where to signpost to support services. Specialist training on specific areas of GBV are often provided by national organisations, free and on-line. Monthly links to these and updates from national sources on VAWG issues are sent out so all Highland professionals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine Enquiries on Domestic Abuse is regularly undertaken within the priority settings of maternity, mental health, substance misuse, A&E, community nursing and sexual health services. Further work is ongoing to assess how this data can inform strategic decision making for the partnership. • Regular Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) take place across the Highlands and Islands. A total of 7 out of a national 35 meeting areas are supported through the HVAWP MARAC Coordinator based in Highlands. This last year we were able to improve our processes with the development of a new live referral system which has greatly increased efficiencies. A streamlined Minute of meetings is now being trialled which already shows great improvements in focussing on risks, protective factors and action planning. More efficiencies are being developed. • Staff in child welfare settings have received training in the Safe and Together model to ensure that all responses to women and children affected by domestic abuse are in line with national guidelines. This is a HVAWP/CPC joint project in Highlands. • HVAWP are key partners in the Highland Bairns Hoose project. Bairns' Hoose offers holistic, child-centred support to those who have been victims or witness of abuse and to children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused harm. • Front line services in the partnership, WA, RASASH (Highland Rape Crisis), Victim Support etc, all provide professional support services for victims of VAWG which also includes advocating on their behalf with other services. RASASH provides emotional support, group work, and criminal justice advocacy to survivors and their non-abusing friends and family. RASASH also has a dedicated outreach service that delivers emotional support to survivors across Highland, travelling to almost every Council Ward. WA support services are a key front-line service for women and girls in Highlands who are experiencing domestic abuse. They also can offer refuge accommodation where required. Both WA and Victim Support also provide IDAA services for MARAC victims in Highland. In particular all groups have in-depth needs assessments with service users so a wide range of specialist services can be accessed to support the LGBT community, those with disabilities, religious/language additional support needs and medical interventions such as drugs and alcohol, mental health and GP's etc.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We work closely with the Government and the Local Authority to provide input to improve and support VAWG services with long term, sustainable and appropriate funding to meet the needs of Highland women and girls experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of GBV. • We work with the Government/COSLA and other national bodies to ensure that the Highlands is able to feed into national strategic developments to meet the requirements of Highland and also to implement national strategies across the Highland Region. • We work with our other Public Protection Colleagues and joint projects are currently being progressed. We also provide input when required into MATAC and MAPPA. • High quality, evidence-based court-mandated programmes are in place at a local level that work with perpetrators of VAWG to hold them to account for, and support them to change, their behaviours.
Priority Activity 2: Hate Crime & Incidents Lead Service: Communities & Place	
Priority Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Police Scotland Highland and Islands Division to encourage reporting of hate crimes and incidents • Promote the Keep Safe campaign in Highland with Police Scotland Highland and Islands Division • Assess potential impact of the new Hate Crime Bill on local awareness activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any Hate incident or Hate Crime has a significant impact on individuals and our communities. Police Scotland is committed to ensuring a consistent and professional response to any reports of Hate Crime or non-crime Hate incidents. • Some incidents are not deemed to meet the threshold of criminality, and these incidents are recorded on our Command-and-Control system, these are reviewed to ensure suitable enquiry has been completed, and that victims are supported. In some circumstances this will mean sharing vulnerabilities with partners to provide support. • Hate Crimes are recorded on our Crime system, and this records our enquiries into such incidents. Hate Crime is a priority for the Division and these offences are progressed timeously. These crimes are reviewed by our Preventions and Interventions unit to establish if any support or crime prevention advice could be offered to victims. In addition, our Service Delivery unit now oversee all Hate Crime and Incidents within the Division to identify repeat locations/victims/perpetrators. Area Commanders can monitor Hate incidents and Hate Crimes within their area and address any identified trends to reduce the impact on our communities. • The Keep Safe initiative has recently been disbanded by the I Am Me Charity and Police Scotland

Priority Activity 3: Reduce prejudiced based bullying in schools Lead Service:	
Priority Actions 2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifestyle Survey will be carried out in Highland schools in 2021 Actions taken will aim to reduce prejudiced based bullying in schools 	2023-25 Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data from the biennial Highland Lifestyle survey shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in number of pupils reporting being in trouble with the police. An increase in the number of pupils reporting daily exercise of one hour or more. Decrease in the number of pupils reporting less than 6 hours of sleep on a school night and an increase in the number reporting 7 or more hours of sleep. A decrease in the number of pupils reporting that they do not brush their teeth at all each day. An increase in the number of S2 and S4 pupils reporting that they never drink alcohol and have never taken drugs. Increase in multiple measures relating to children's rights and participation. Increase in the number of pupils reporting feeling healthy, active, nurtured, achieving and responsible. Our Positive Relationships Anti-Bullying Guidance was created by young people from Skye and is in line with Scottish Government Guidance. A Highland bullying survey is available for schools to use to assess the extent of discrimination and bullying in their school, where and why. All children in secondary school can self-refer to counselling services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular engagement with the Highland Youth Parliament enables their views to be sought and represented and allows for ongoing dialogue and feedback.
Equality Outcome 4: With Partners in Highland, work to reduce socio-economic disadvantage for people from identified groups in the light of Covid-19 in line with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan	
Priority Activity 1: Income Maximisation Lead Service: Resources & Finance	
Priority Actions 2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting Entitlement - Raise awareness of entitlements and where to get support with a 	2023-25 Update: <p><u>Welfare Advice & Health Partnership - GP Financial Inclusion Pathway</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Welfare Advice & Health Partnership (WAHP) is a joint programme between NHS Highland and the Highland Council funded by Improvement Services until March 2025. It

<p>particular focus on changing circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing in-work poverty 	<p>was set up at the end of 2022 and went live in January 2023. The programme is to provide access to money and welfare rights advice in primary care settings. This is achieved by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WAHP referral pathway is operating to enable GP practices to refer to the Council's Welfare Team. Welfare advice specialists provide an effective support service on all matters relating to welfare benefits and entitlements. The overall aim of the service is to ensure that the correct amount of benefit is paid at the correct time and to assist with budgeting skills so that households can pay their bills, heat their homes, and have a better quality of life. WAHP's provide GP practices with specialist welfare advice specialists who can support patients to improve their financial situation. There is a strong correlation between improving people's financial situation and improved health outcomes so supporting patients around financial issues should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure people are directed to the right support. help reduce demand on practice time through practice staff being able to identify patients who would benefit from financial advice during appointments allow GP appointments to be more focused on medical matters. For 23/24, there were 29 GP referrals via the Welfare & Advice Partnership – the project started in July 2023 and takes time to work and embed. Housing and Welfare support team have a referral pathway in place where Housing will refer in Gypsy travellers to help with their finances and changes with tenancies – Income Maximisation and Benefit checks.
<p>Priority Activity 2: Food Insecurity Lead Service: Communities & Place</p>	
<p>Priority Actions 2021:</p>	<p>2023-25 Update:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Food Support - Support community resilience groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the last two years CFINE have been supported with Ward Budget funds from across Highland, this has helped provide food to food tables and sharing sheds across the region

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying Individuals Needing Support - Targeting referral networks through universal services to ensure the identification of individuals needing support. Support the development of sustainable food tables and fridges in order to reduce the stigma associated with accessing food support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Food Support – Support has been given to develop sustainable food tables and fridges in order to reduce the stigma associated with accessing food support including the development of a ‘How to’ guide to support groups wishing to take this forward. Work continued to promote the availability of the Highland Food Activity Map across Highland communities. The map includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> food banks local food producers community fridges and larders community café The map is available at www.highlandtsi.org.uk/map Food support Case Study – Inverness Foodstuff Inverness Foodstuff has been providing two-course lunches on Wednesdays and Fridays in Hilton Community Centre since 1 September 2023. One of the key aims of the Inverness Foodstuff@Hilton project is to address social isolation and loneliness. Participants attending Inverness Foodstuff@Hilton on 10 and 12 April 2024 were invited to complete a short questionnaire seeking their feedback about the service provided to date. <p>A total of 39 participants chose to complete the questionnaire, approximately 60% response rate. 2,777 lunches produced for the period 1 September 2023 to 29 March 2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85% of participants said they had made new friends. 66% said they felt less lonely since coming to Inverness 97% felt welcomed and part of a community. 72% felt their mental health and wellbeing had improved since coming to Inverness Foodstuff@Hilton. 100% of survey respondents said they looked forward to coming to Inverness Foodstuff@Hilton and enjoyed the lunch. <p>Overall, the survey results indicate that the participants who come along to Inverness Foodstuff@Hilton have an overwhelmingly positive experience. Participants’ feedback and many comments highlight the friendly, welcoming atmosphere as well as the great food and excellent service provided by staff/volunteers. Given the main project aim is to address social isolation and loneliness Inverness Foodstuff (IF) appear to be meeting that aim as the majority of participants, 74%, when asked why</p>
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	<p>they came to Inverness Foodstuff@Hilton said they came for the company/to meet new people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food support Case Study – Kyle of Sutherland Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust use of Vouchers rather than providing food, so people can buy what they need /want. These are made available through local shops which makes it easier for people and also supports the local community. (Only restrictions are No tobacco products, no alcohol & no gambling.) The number of vouchers available are dependent on how much money KoSDT raises /donations are received. KoSDT also managed to raise some vouchers for school clothes / shoes etc. Food Support Case Study – Dingwall Community Trust Testimony from service user: Dingwall Community Fridge... "made a significant difference to our lives. Never more so than during COVID and then through the financial crisis. We are managing a bit better now and we only occasionally use the fridge, but I have now become a volunteer and help to collect food and set up the fridge. It's great to give back and be part of a fantastic group of people. They are so committed and dedicated. For me and my family, they ensured that when I was in need I didn't suffer from any stigma, was never made to feel less than anyone else. I recently came across another family, a single mum with 5 kids. The mum and some of the children have severe food allergies. I mentioned them to the Dingwall Community 27 Fridge and they quickly we were able to put together 3 large shopping bags of food to meet their specific needs. I was I so proud of them, so happy we were able to respond so quickly and help another family in need. This is such a great service that helps so many local people". Identifying Individuals Needing Support - Worrying About Money? / Money Counts Highland Community Planning partners including Highland Council and NHS Highland and wider partners including Social Security Scotland, Independent Food Aid Network, Trussell Trust, and Citizens Advice Bureau have collaborated to develop resources aimed at addressing poverty including the Worrying About Money? Leaflet. NHS Highland funded and, in partnership developed a Worrying About Money? app. Both are promoted via fortnightly HC community updates Money Counts training courses have been developed to promote targeted support to universal service users as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1 - is aimed at anyone who is in a position to have a brief conversation with individuals around money worries. The course aims to build the
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	<p>confidence of staff to offer income maximisation help and explains how to ask about money worries and where and how to refer for support. Course length – 45 mins • Level 2 - aims to increase confidence of staff working with people that may benefit from income maximisation help. It aims to increase staff's understanding of poverty and the importance of asking about money worries, and what support services are available what they can offer. Course length – 1.5 hrs • A Level 3 course aimed at Managers and supervisors has been developed and is being piloted in 24/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 23/24 NHS Highland ran several Money Counts courses as follows: • Level 1 courses: 15 courses with 101 participants • Level 2 courses: 9 courses with 50 participants Evaluation results received immediately after each course delivered which assessed the difference in confidence and knowledge for participants for attendance at level 1 courses Enhanced evaluation completed for those who attended a level 2 course which explores knowledge against the agreed learning outcomes. A 6 month follow up review was undertaken for those who attended a level 2 course over Oct 22 – March 23 that helped to inform learning about the impact of the course. In 2023/24 a total of 1941 IFAN leaflets were distributed from HIRS to 28 separate outlets. (Note – this figure would not include any downloads made directly from the IFAN website) In 1 year (23/24) there were 500 hits on the recently developed Worrying About Money app. (WAM app) • Free School Meals - Continued development of strategies to increase uptake of free school meals targeted at secondary provision. Availability of free school meals was promoted during 2023/24 via social media and direct through school network channels. National negotiations are ongoing on data sharing to enable automatic awards of free school meals and ensure families do not have to apply. The Council's Head of Revenues and Business Support is working with COSLA and the Cabinet office to improve data sharing to enable automatic entitlement to encourage greater uptake. • 74 direct free school meal only referrals were made by the welfare support team Note: It is not possible to quantify how many free school meal applications are the result of a general welfare support referral as when assisting a customer with a Benefit claim for any benefit then all relevant benefits and entitlements are assessed, but not individually recorded as referrals. • Energy and Fuel Advice During 2023/24 the Highland Council Welfare Support Team identified potential beneficiary households for energy and fuel advice and
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	<p>referred direct to the Energy Advice Project run by CAB Inverness CAB undertake checks and provided advice regarding switching. HC Housing refer tenants to AliEnergy for energy advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numbers helped with energy matters in 23/24 were 3290. Inverness CAB undertook checks and provided advice regarding switching to an excess of 3200 households in 23/24. In 23/24 AliEnergy supported 847 HC tenants, 469 of these were referred by HC. The rest were either self-referrals (e.g. signposted by HC staff/ tenant newsletters/ word of mouth etc.) or referred by other agencies AliEnergy also supported 477 households in the Highland region that were not HC tenants. Benefits Maximise uptake of DWP and Social Security Scotland benefits, including those with childcare costs. Support for families to maximise incomes and ensure households access all entitlements continued to be a focus for partners during 2023/24. Specialist support is available through the Highland Council Welfare Team and CAB Highland network and this was promoted through the wider Partnership and directly signposted to individuals and families who would benefit. More than 26,500 residents within Highland sought support from Welfare services (Highland Council and CAB) during the financial year 23/24. This generated more than 111,300 client contacts seeking advice on a variety of issues including cost of living, welfare, money and housing. In Highland, financial gains derived for clients during 2023/24, by these welfare services, exceeded £28.8m (+£2.5m compared with 22/23) Scottish Child Payment – Highland - 195,530 payments made up to 30/06/24, value of payments £28,322,766; for the period 2023-2024 - 86,210 payments made, value of payments £15,521,675 Best Start Grant & Best Start Foods – Highland – Payments made up to 30/06/24, unfortunately payments cannot be broken down into the financial years Pregnancy & Baby Payment - £1,398,898 Early Learning Payment - £1,168,450 School Age Payment - £1,201,166 Best Start Foods £1,844,526 Child Disability Payment – Highland - 138,620 payments made up to 30/06/24, value of payments £28,551,040 Highland Employability Service 38 Aim High is a collaboration between the Highland Employability Service, My Future My Success and Third Sector partners to provide a smooth transition between school leavers and the employability service. At
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	the core is the level 4 Employability Award, allowing young people to consider their next steps and receive support to progress towards the goal of fair and sustainable employment
Priority Activity 3: Child Poverty Health & Social Care	
Priority Actions 2021	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the uptake of clothing grants Encouraging the update of concessionary leisure schemes for children with low-income backgrounds Implementation of Northern Alliance Cost of the School Day Toolkit <p>Increase access to and update of affordable and flexible childcare including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and increase update of 1140 hours ELC provision Develop a strategy to promote awareness of access to support for childcare costs and access to tax free childcare Explore options with partnerships to support flexible models of childcare in individual communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clothing Grants - During 2023/24, clothing grants were promoted through schools and social media channels. A shared form was developed to jointly promote free school meals and clothing grant uptake. National negotiations are ongoing on data sharing to enable automatic awards of free school meals and ensure families do not have to apply. In 2023/24, 4822 pupils were entitled to clothing grants, an increase of 424 (+9.6%) from 2022/23. Concessionary Leisure Schemes – promotion was carried out to increase the uptake of concessionary leisure schemes for children with low-income backgrounds through specific targeting of the opportunity to free school meals and clothing grants recipients High Life Highland Budget Leisure Card. Individuals and families in receipt of income related benefits are eligible for the budget scheme where customers: can access leisure centres for fifty pence per visit, or <ul style="list-style-type: none"> take up a subscription for £3 per month for individuals or £5 for families. (This was introduced in 2022 to encourage increased activity levels and bring the budget card into line with the main leisure subscription scheme). In relation to concessionary (budget card) HLH holders – 9,667 households (19,252 individuals) across Highland have a registered budget card. Of the 19,252 cardholders, 5,215 are under 18 years old, and 878 are under-five Cost of the School Day - During school session 23-24, 7 schools from Highland signed up to be part of the CoSD Voice Network. The CoSD Voice Participation Officer worked with a group of learners from each school and a member of staff. This took the form of a face-to-face workshop where learners had the opportunity to talk about issues related to costs associated with the school day. The workshop included a rights-based approach with UNCRC rights also being discussed in this context. Initial discussions were introduced using a fictional character who was facing barriers with costs. The Attainment Advisor provided professional online learning sessions on CoSD for; HTs, Middle Leaders, Supply Teachers, NQTs, student teachers and the learning for sustainability network. A face-to-face workshop on CoSD was provided for ELC managers and practitioners re cost of the ELC/Nursery Day. Effective

	<p>practice was shared via HT meetings. Attainment Advisor provided information and links re CoSD in the termly newsletter issues by the PLL Academy. AA had provided a newsletter for all schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare - New models piloted. A more sustainable delivery model in place, including a shift in the balance of ELC delivery between LA and PVI providers. • Successful Addressing Depopulation funding bid focused on new models of delivering rural childcare, including engaging rural consultant to work with partners to develop integrated Single Care Model (SCM) pathway pilot. Partners include CALA, HIE, Highland Council, NHS Highland, Care Inspectorate and 3rd/private providers. • Exploring joint work with employability service on parental employability courses including providing childcare to reduce barriers to participation. A Rural childcare policy or approach is gathering momentum and will provide greater flexibility to ensure all areas have better access to childcare including childminding to support parental employment as well as benefits for child. Having childcare acknowledged as vital infrastructure to provide economic sustainability in rural areas has been key Highland Employability Service worked with Scottish Child-Minding Association (SCMA) to support people in areas of Highland with no or limited provision to become childminders, supporting training and initial set up costs. Resulted in 9 new childminders coming on stream by end March 2024.
Equality Outcome 5: In Highland, people from identified groups, including young people, will have improved access to the resources needed to support their mental health and wellbeing.	
Priority activity 1: Partnership activities Lead Service: Communities and Place	
Priority Actions 2021: The partnership Mental Health Delivery Group action plan will progress activity in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years, Childhood and Adolescence – a preventative approach • Tackling Stigma and Discrimination - supporting employers and public services 	2023-25 Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years, Childhood and Adolescence Children & young people service mapping underway, Children & Young People Steering Group under Mental Health Delivery Group leading. Children & young people website updated - resource supporting the wellbeing of children and young people: Benadette Cairns and the Highland Council Education Psychology team keep updated: Supporting the wellbeing of our C&YP. • All ages: mental health and wellbeing website Highland Mental Wellbeing – A collection of resources to support mental wellbeing maintained by NHS Highland Public Health

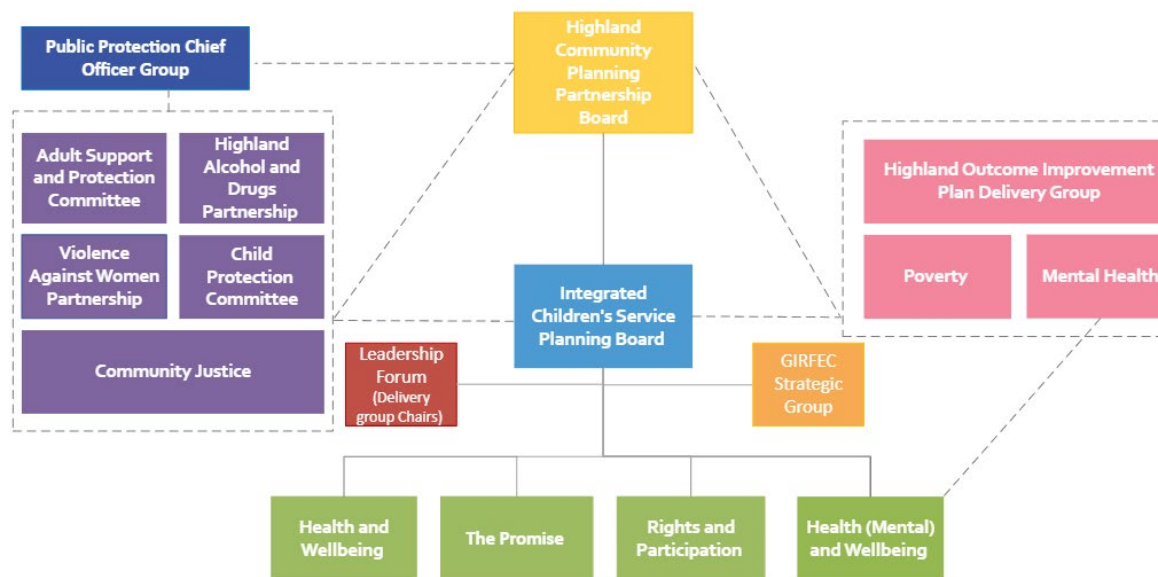
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working and Responding Together - stronger collaborative approach across the public, third and independent sectors • Participation and Inclusion - enabling people to have control over their lives and facilitating active involvement 	<p>Directorate's Health Improvement Team on behalf of the Highland Community Planning Partnership, plus various apps are available – including Prevent Suicide Highland, Hope (alcohol and drug), WAM (worrying about money). Signposting opportunities, circulated to staff and partners regularly through various newsletter and bulletins. Enabling and encouraging access to opportunities and knowledge.</p> <p>Campaigns and communication – including mental health awareness week, suicide prevention week, coordinated by the Communications and Engagement Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group, also includes a coordinated communications calendar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Tackling Stigma and Discrimination</u> First Highland Trauma Summit took place in September 2024. Organised by the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group. Trauma Champions are brought together from across Highland and agencies within the Trauma Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group. Trauma Informed Practice Programme Lead, a temporary role hosted within the NHS Highland Health Improvement Team is now in post for 12 months initially, funded through Scottish Government, tasked with rolling out the trauma informed roadmap. • <u>Working and Responding Together</u> Various multi-agency forums exist within the Mental Health Delivery Group landscape and wider Highland Community Planning Partnership, bringing together partners and agencies to work together collaboratively. All of the Steering Groups within the Mental Health Delivery Group are multi-sector, further details can be found on the Highland CPP website: Mental Health Highland Community Planning Partnership. In addition and in response to the revised Highland Outcome Improvement Plan a new Short Life Working Group focussing on Health Inequalities has been established in 2025. Working towards aligning HOIP priorities with Health Inequalities and utilising evidence and data effectively. • A revision of the Mental Health Delivery Group priorities is due to take place later in 2025. The current priorities were developed over a number of months between 2022/23, including a series of in person events, further details can be found on the Highland CPP website: Mental Health Highland Community Planning Partnership.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Partnerships are provided with updates on progress regularly through the HS Health Improvement Team, for example a suicide prevention series of presentations has recently taken place. Creating Hope Together, the Highland Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2022 – 2025 was launched during this period, with a series of local forums being established also. Due for review in 2025. <p><u>Participation and Inclusion</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mental Health Deliver Group doesn't deliver services directly; however, it does support a range of organisations from across the different sectors, training partners is one element of this support. Inclusion includes the delivery of a range of training opportunities which are made available across the partners – including Suicide Intervention and Prevention Programme which is delivered on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership, to ensure participation and inclusion of people who need their services. Cross sector training also includes introduction mental health awareness course, Scottish mental health first aid for example. A partnership approach is adopted with the Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund for Adults, a range of partners are invited to join decision making panels. The fund is managed by HTSI.
Priority activity 2: Mental Health and Wellbeing action plan (staff) Lead Service: HR	
Priority actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued support to staff Analysis of staff wellbeing survey carried out in April 2021 (following a survey in 2020) will inform further actions to address concerns. to address concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Mental Health and Wellbeing hotline has been established. This is detailed in the case study below. The Skilled level suicide intervention course, "Safe For Now", designed by OHSW team and delivered via Highland Community Planning Partnership has been rolled out. Administration supplied by NHS staff using TURAS. The council's Mental Health and Wellbeing Representatives (MHWR) initiative is currently under review to reflect changes in working practices. We currently have 64 MHWR staff volunteers working across all areas of the council.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A MH&WR dedicated e-mail has been introduced as an alternative route to support, in addition to the new MH&W helpline which provides a callback option from a MHWR. • The Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub on Staff Connections has been revised and has received very positive feedback. • The Mental Health and Wellbeing Viva Engage page is generating a lot of traffic and positive feedback.
Priority activity 3: Integrated Children's Services Plan - mental health and wellbeing Lead Service: Education and Learning and H&SC	
Priority actions 2021	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the skill and knowledge of staff in the areas associated with building and maintaining good mental health and emotional wellbeing • Engage with children and young people to gather their views of what makes a 'good' school in relation to support for mental health and wellbeing, to provide a progression for schools to self-evaluate their strengths and next steps. • Agree and implement a trauma-informed infant mental health strategy to support very young children and their parents. • Track the provision of early intervention services in relation to mental health support for children and young people, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Integrated Children's Service Plan identified Thematic areas for the delivery plans and delivery groups underpinned by UNCRC, GIRFEC, The Promise, Trauma Informed Approaches and Whole Family Wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These thematic areas included – Children and Young People Health and Wellbeing (Mental Health), Health and Wellbeing, The Promise, Rights and Participation, Child Protection, Poverty and Alcohol and Drugs

including Counselling in Highland Schools.

- The Plan incorporates commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protecting young people from discrimination, and to implementing 'The Promise' to ensure that services and support are shaped by the voices and needs of children, young people and families
- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education



- - The Mental health and wellbeing delivery group is made up of a partnership of statutory and third sector colleagues.
 - The group undertook a mapping workshop this will be used by fitting this into the THRIVE framework but also how the information is used by services and signposted to raise awareness for parents/young people.
- Pathways are being developed for young people to gain a better understanding across the system and so any gaps can be identified. Funding streams can then be linked, and this will influence funding decisions to ensure there is a strategic focus
- The Highland Promise Plan 2025-2028 has been produced.
 - The Plan considered the diversity of care experienced children and family's needs, including, for example: age and stage of development, gender, disability, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and, importantly, the range of care 'placements' where children live and are looked after. Importantly for Highland,

	<p>the geographical context e.g. urban and rural was also be considered. Corporate parents must also work in partnership, pulling joint duties of collaboration and planning together. Like most extended families, the corporate family consists of many parts – local authorities as a whole; health services, both universal and specialist; independent and 3rd sector; police, children’s hearing system and all those broader parts of the system which support service delivery. These Are Our Bairns has a powerful lasting message for all corporate parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>‘Bringing up a child successfully depends very much on all family members playing their parts. It may be a particular point in a child’s life, or it may be constant, but together all of those parts are a powerful force for good’</i> (These Are Our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent, 2008). ○ The Highland Promise Plan (HPP) is built on the voices and experiences of care experienced children and young people through a broad range of engagement and participation activities across Highland. The VOICE of children and young people form a significant part of the development of the draft plan through the findings from Highland’s Children & Young People Participation Strategy (over 800+ young people) and reviews of Highland’s residential care (Your Voice Matters, 15 YP). The views, feedback, data and thematic analysis of all these collaborative activities have contributed to the production of the plan. ○ ‘Raising Awareness of The Promise’ induction sessions and Promise Cafés are conducted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared trauma informed approach across the partnership: Lead Officer Helen Perkins appointed, hosted within Public Health team - ICSB Development session on Trauma Informed Systems. Trauma Champions appointed through out the partnership and a Trauma Summit held in September 2024 for strategic leadership in Highland in Statutory and 3rd Sector. • A Child Friendly Complaints Process in Highland is being developed and a group of young people have been identified to consult on the production of this. Work is ongoing to create a guidance document to support practitioners understand what ‘capacity’ means in relation to Child Friendly Complaints, but also more widely.
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- “Just Ask” early multi-disciplinary help ‘Just ask’ advice line was set up in 2018. This is a dedicated helpline enabling direct access for families and professionals to specialist advice, guidance and support at an early stage. A range of professionals now contribute to this advice line with an average of 900 calls per year, 80% of calls come directly from families for early help and guidance.
- School Nursing. Working with families in their communities and with schools, school nurses support a broad range of children, young people and families affected by inequalities and poverty. School Nurses, like health visitors, require to be advanced SCPHN qualified. Since 2019, 20 staff have been supported through this course. The workforce remains relatively small with 21 full time equivalent (FTE) qualified school nurses across 29 staff, supported by staff nurses and nursing assistants.
 - Vacancy across West/North/Mid Highland area is below 8% with relative stability. The new school nursing role is in relative infancy, and it is acknowledged that it will take a number of years before the workforce is fully qualified, skilled and confident in their role.
- Honouring The Promise and building on the requirements of the UNCRC a new digital platform for school nursing has been designed in collaboration with children and young people to support direct access to school nurse support. The voice of over 120 children and young people has informed the content and design of the platform which should enable them to be able to reach more easily into school nursing advice, guidance and support independently and with confidence.
- Kooth, a service that supports children and young people in terms of their ability to self-refer and to support for a multitude of things that concern them including their mental health. Kooth is an essential part of our offer to children and young people to maintain good mental health and wellbeing. The evaluation of Kooth it is well received and positively received by our children and young people. This is complementary and provides choice for children and young people who also have access to the School Counselling Service.
- Every school in Highland has a School Counselling Service to support Children and Young People over the age of 10 Years. The service is provided by fully trained registered counsellors, delivered 1:1, at both face to face and/or online sessions either in school, or at another agreed location.

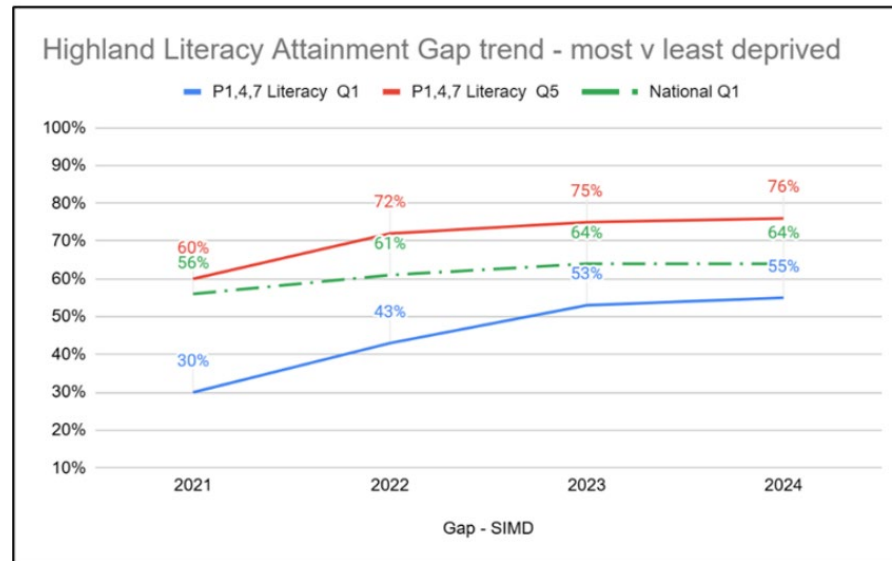
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wellbeing Highland website is available for Children, Young People, Parents and Carers to access resources and information to promote health and wellbeing. • https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/children-young-people • A Rights and Participation Website has been developed and provides the opportunity for children and young people to have their voice heard within a designated area of the site and engage in opportunities to share their views to support service design, the Children and Young Peoples Participation Strategy is hosted on this site for organisation to access and use. The site shares the promotion of children's rights and how Children's rights are met. • https://www.childrensrightshighland.co.uk/home • Distress Brief Intervention approach – Change Mental Health KI the Distress Brief Intervention DBI was established in 2016 with support of the Scottish Government to focus on suicide prevention and MH strategies. It went live with NHS 24 MH Hub in June 2020, supported by a DBI Central Team formed alongside the Government. All teams work collaboratively to streamline the process and support capacity issues. DBI is delivered by third sector providers supported by the University of Glasgow. It constitutes short supportive problem-solving contact with an individual presenting to guidance teachers in distress. Other referrals come from GPS, Police, Ambulance, NHS, Education etc, with no self-referrals, and an average 140 referrals per month to Change Mental Health and 230-250 within the HUB. In June 2023 5 schools are signed up to the service,. DBI is actively developing throughout schools through various avenues to raise awareness and support in Inverness. Contact is made within 24hrs of guidance making the referral and 3 attempts made with the individual. Schools are very supportive, and this is paramount within test of change. DBI provides person centred support for 14 days, self-management plan and distress management plan thereafter, and DBI tools. Appointments are mostly conducted within schools. It has been found that support can last longer than the 14-day adult model as young people can take longer to engage but once they are, are doing very well. It is a hope this could roll out wider,
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education and Learning Service Plan now includes specific actions to address inequality. • The Highland Integrated Children's Services Board has a Children's Rights and Participation Improvement Group, chaired by the Principal Educational Psychologist, that supports UNCRC and The Promise in partnership with other organisations and services. .
Equality Outcome 6: Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality through delivery of curriculum for excellence and wider school approaches following the principles of the Highland Practice Model and SHANNARI.	
Priority activity 1: Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality and children's rights	
Lead Service: Education and Learning	
Priority Actions 2021	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Equality policies to be reviewed • There will be an increase in the number of schools with pupil lead equalities groups in schools • Re-establish an Equalities Working Group across education and Learning to monitor key outcomes and improvements for children and young people with protected characteristics • Pupils will report a greater level of involvement in decisions that affect them within schools and a realisation of their rights in relation to the UNCRC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children's Participation Strategy was launched in August 2024 after extensive consultation with children and young people of all ages. This is now being progressed, with young people, to create a clear process for children to inform and influence decision making in Highland. • Schools, supported by officers, continue to develop the effectiveness of their pupil councils to shape decision making at a school level. • Outcomes from The Highland Lifestyle Survey inform and impact on decision-making. • The Lifestyle Survey is undertaken every 2 years with P7, S2 and S4 students. In 2023 when the survey was last undertaken, 73% of pupils reported receiving lessons on children's rights. With the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scot's law, it is intended that schools will have a greater focus on this area of work and promote children's rights much more through lessons, across the curriculum. The Lifestyle Survey will be undertaken in spring 2025 and will provide updated data on this measure. • Schools in Highland are engaged with the Rights Respecting Schools Programme and deliver specific improvement activity around children's rights. • We will continue to encourage and support more schools to become Rights Respecting Schools (RRS), providing dedicated support from the Collaborative Improvement Team and brokering support from the schools currently engaged in RRS. In primary 10 schools have registered for bronze, 59 have achieved bronze, 28 have achieved silver, 8 have achieved gold with one re-accredited. In secondary, 11 have achieved bronze, 11 have registered for silver, 2 have achieved silver, 1 has achieved gold. 3 Special Schools have achieved bronze. For 3-18, 1 school has registered for bronze, 1 has achieved bronze

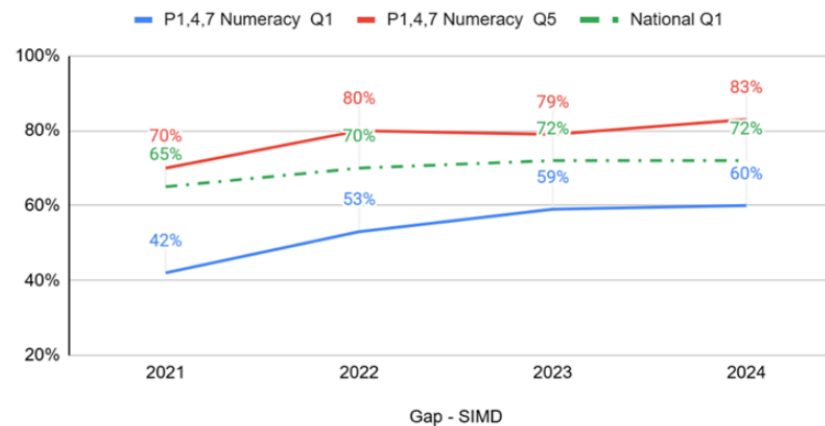
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering children - giving children the knowledge and confidence to use their rights and hold organisations to account. • A Children and Young People's Guide to UNCRC is available on the Wellbeing Highland Website. • Partnership working with groups such as Highland One World provide resources and training to support the Sustainable Development Goals and to engage with children and young people on topics that are important to them
Outcome 7: Increase the number of young people with protected characteristics leaving school moving into positive and sustained destinations	
Priority activity 1: Reducing gender segregation and stereotyping within the curriculum	
Lead Service: Education and Learning	
Priority Actions 2021	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the use of the INCLUDE Guidance on Equality, schools will review their curricular materials and practices to reduce gender segregation and stereotyping. • Training on gender bias and unconscious bias will be promoted across Highland schools and services. • The creation and implementation of the next generation of SEEMIS will enable pupils to be identified but their sex at birth and also by their preferred gender identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment tools such as Our SHANARRI School and INCLUDE are promoted through the https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/ website. This includes advice and information for practitioners to support a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing. These self-assessment tools have been highlighted by Education Scotland as examples of good practice for practitioners and we will continue to advocate their use in schools while updating the links to support a Whole School Approach. • A range of training is available on a regular basis through the staff development calendar. This includes training on Mental Health and Wellbeing, Trauma Informed Practice, Understanding the Teenage Brain, Promoting Positive Relationships, Equality, Diversity and Children's Rights etc. A wide range of regularly delivered training on these topics and ad hoc, bespoke training for settings is delivered by The Psychological Service. • A range of tailored mentoring, counselling and support has been provided to young people across Highland secondary schools to improve attendance, engagement and attainment.
Outcome 8: Reduce attainment and achievement gaps between pupils with protected characteristics and also those living in poverty.	
Priority activity 1: Reduce attainment and achievement gaps	
Lead Service: Education and Learning	
Priority Activity 2021:	2023-25 Update:

- Implementation of a new educational improvement approach with the aim of improving educational outcomes for children.

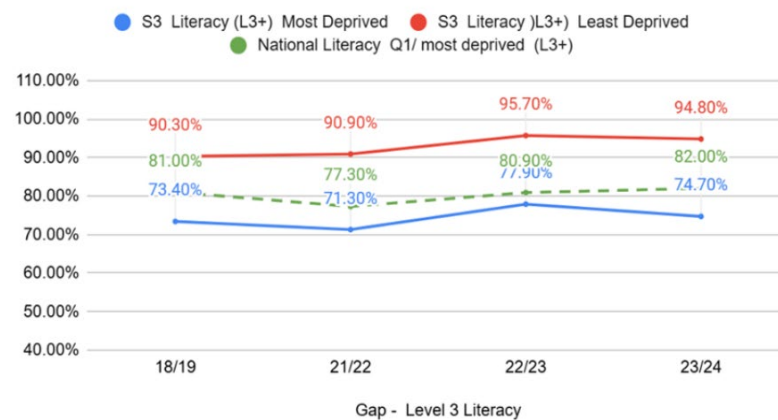
- July 2024 data shows that Highland has been consistently and systematically closing the gap to National in terms of primary attainment over the last 3 years, culminating in July 2024 where Highland has achieved its highest attainment for primary aged pupils in every area of literacy and numeracy. Attainment in literacy and numeracy for Primary stage pupils living in Highland's most deprived data zones has increased by 12% in literacy and 7% in numeracy since 2022 (July 2024).
- Implement revised Parental Engagement Strategy produced working with partners to support parents and carers to support their children's development, learning and achievement from birth to adulthood, using evidence-informed strategies.
- In literacy attainment at level 4 for children living in our most deprived data zones has increased by 5% on the previous year and is double the National rate of improvement. In numeracy there has been a 3-year improving trend for attainment at level 4 numeracy. L4 numeracy attainment for young people living in our most deprived zones is in line with National attainment for the same measure (July 2024)



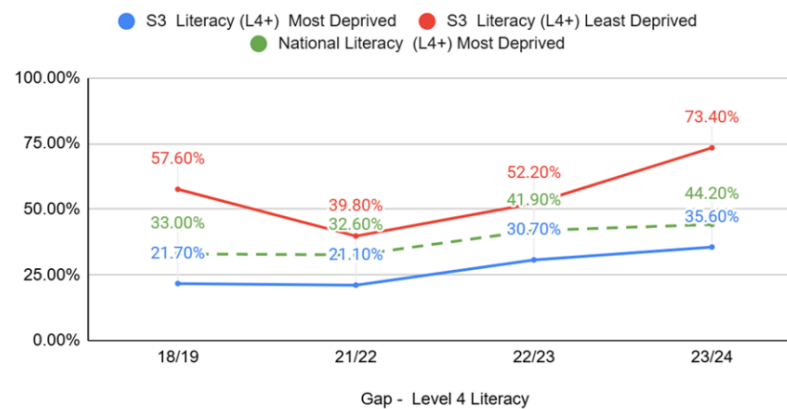
Highland Numeracy Attainment Gap trend - Most v least deprived



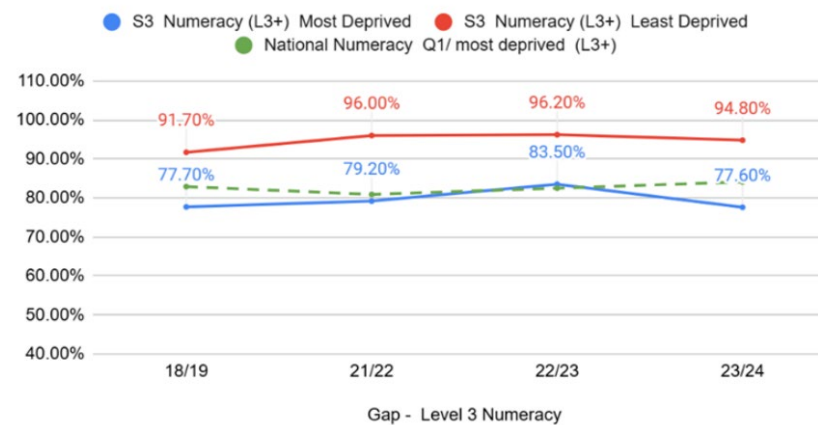
Highland Attainment Gap - % S3 Pupils Attaining Level 3+ Literacy

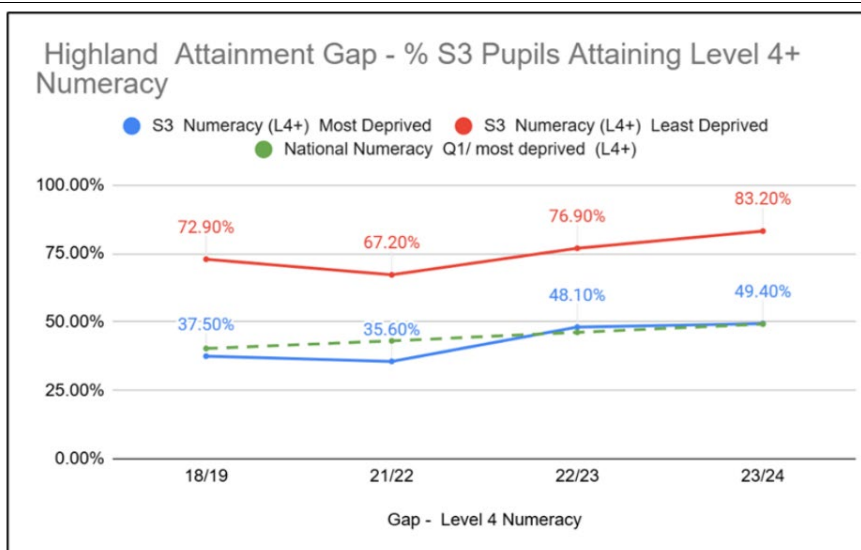


Highland Attainment Gap - % S3 Pupils Attaining Level 4+ Literacy



Highland Attainment Gap - % S3 Pupils Attaining Level 3+ Numeracy





- A core focus on leadership, collaborative learning, training and peer support in key areas including inclusion, rights and equalities, ASN and early intervention
- Scoping opportunities for working with (the Northern Alliance) partners on understanding the poverty related attainment gap

- Officers participate in national Scottish Attainment Challenge reference group, sharing best practice in relation to closing the poverty-related the attainment gap with schools.
- Training specifically focused on strategies to improve primary attainment for disadvantaged pupils delivered to leaders and practitioners.
- Increased collaboration and impact, working with partners via Integrated Children's Services work.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of spend and outcomes in order to understand the impacts of the Pupil Equity Funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of the Highland Primary attainment programme, all schools have considered pupil attainment in relation to the attainment gap and those children requiring additional intervention and tracking to support improvement as part of this analysis and review during attainment meetings at school and Local Authority level
Outcome 9: We will meet the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning – reduce exclusions, improve the attainment of pupils looked after by the local authority, support for children from armed forces families	
Priority activity 1: Review of work for interrupted learners Lead Service: Education and Learning	
Priority Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will meet the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning – reduce exclusions, improve the attainment of pupils looked after by the local authority, support for children from armed forces families etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with organisations such as Inspiring Young Voices, youth groups, young carers' organisations, Growing2gether etc, provide direct support and advocacy for children and young people who are marginalised. They support specific groups of children and young people to access their rights and represent their specific needs within Highland Council strategic groups. Psychological Services have produced guidance on how to gather the views of children who require different approaches due to their learning and sensory needs. Pupils from several schools have collaborated with officers to create 'Our SHANARRI School', a self-evaluation tool that can be used with pupils to provide a baseline for pupil wellbeing, before initiating any support programmes. The Military Liaison Group is led by a member of the Psychological Service, who delivers the operational work relating to the Education section of the Armed Forces Covenant. This work is supported by a multi-agency group called the Military Liaison Group (Education) and is reflected on the Highland Council Armed Forces Website.
Equality Outcome 10: Increase the Council's understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights-based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services	
Priority Activity 1: Increase the understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and embed across Council services Lead Service: Education/All Services	
Priority Actions 2021:	2023-25 Update:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake awareness raising sessions with staff and members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff training on UNCRC is included in Equality, Diversity and Children's Rights training, alongside training on positive relationships and bullying prevention. Training is included in the Staff Development Calendar and bespoke training is delivered on request from individual schools and services.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider implications of Services and help develop relevant actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on integrating Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments into the work of the Council continues to progress, in line with corporate and directorate policies. A process of Integrated Impact Assessments has also been created and implemented across The Highland Council and from 1 July 2024 all changes to policy, guidance and service delivery will require an Integrated Impact Assessment. This process includes Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments, where managers are required to identify the UNCRC Articles that link with the policy/service change. Programmes running in Highland schools to promote children's rights include UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools, Highland Council's My Rights to Wellbeing and Resilient Kids, and Scottish Government peer-led programmes such as Mentors for Violence Prevention. Work is ongoing to develop a child friendly complaints procedure within the guidance provided by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman in readiness for the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law.
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3.2 Review of Equality Outcomes 2025-2029

Equality outcomes are defined by the EHRC as 'results that focus on making improvements to the lives of people protected under the Equality Act'. Public bodies were required to first publish a set of equality outcomes by 30 April 2013, and every four years thereafter. We are also required to publish a progress report every two years.

Our equality outcomes have been reviewed with the aim of continuing to tackle some of the most significant inequalities, including those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The development of our Equality Outcomes has been informed by national and local data, feedback from local equality groups and national equality priorities. There will continue to be ongoing engagement with equality stakeholders which will assist in informing the actions to deliver against our equality outcomes over the next 4 years.

The outcomes will continue to be under review with the opportunity to add additional outcomes in 2027, should evidence suggest there is a particular focus. For example, in 2023, an additional outcome was added on children's rights to reflect the importance of this area of development.

The priorities and associated actions expressed in our Equality Outcomes for 2021-25 will, therefore, be under continual review and maybe revised or new activity identified and developed.

The proposed outcomes for 2025-2027 are as follows:

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2025 – 2029		Co-ordinating Service(s)
1.	<p>A more diverse workforce that reflects our community</p> <p><i>Priority Activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved data gathering and reporting to better understand our workforce Equality & Diversity profile• Targeted positive action to address areas of underrepresentation, increase EDI awareness and enhance inclusivity, with particular focus on Neurodiversity and Gender Identity• Improving employment prospects of resettled refugee families in Highland	Corporate – HR

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2025 – 2029		Co-ordinating Service(s)
2.	<p>Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making.</p> <p>Priority Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved engagement for people with protected characteristics to influence service planning, design and decision making Improved access to services and information about services for disabled people Improve the approach to inclusive communication and the information available about Council services for disabled people Improving the lives of Highland's Gypsy / Travellers 	Place - Communities
3.	<p>In Highland, people from identified groups feel respected and equally safe from harm</p> <p>Priority Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence against Women & Girls Hate crimes and Hate incidents Reduce homophobic-based bullying in schools 	People – Health and Social and Education
4.	<p>Work to reduce poverty and inequality for people across Highland</p> <p>Priority Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure household incomes are maximised and people are receiving all they are entitled to Work to reduce levels of child poverty across Highland Through the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission, consider, improve and accelerate our collective approach in Highland to tackling poverty and equalities. 	Place - Communities
5.	<p>In Highland, people at risk of poorer mental health and wellbeing (from identified groups, including young people), will have improved access to the resources needed to support their mental health and wellbeing</p> <p>Priority Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to co-produced and integrated services and resources to ensure that people from identified groups in Highland benefit from good health and social wellbeing opportunities, accessing the right support at the right time through a whole system approach. Integrated Children's Services Plan – mental health & wellbeing 	People – Health and Social Care and Education

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2025 – 2029		Co-ordinating Service(s)
6.	<p>Staff and pupils have an increasing understanding of equality and acceptance of diversity through embedded approaches based on the principles of the National Practice Model.</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality and children's rights and wellbeing 	People - Education
7.	<p>Increase the number of young people with protected characteristics leaving school moving into positive and sustained destinations</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing gender segregation and stereotyping within the curriculum 	People – Education
8.	<p>Reduce attainment and achievement gaps between pupils with protected characteristics and those living in poverty</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce attainment and achievement gaps for those with protected characteristics 	People - Education
9.	<p>We will meet the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning – reduce exclusions, improve the attainment of pupils looked after by the local authority, support for children from armed forces families</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of work for interrupted learners 	People - Education
10.	<p>Increase the Council's understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights-based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services.</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake awareness raising sessions with staff and members • Consider implications of services and develop relevant actions 	People – Education

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2025 – 2029		Co-ordinating Service(s)
11.	<p>Increase awareness of neurodiversity within our staff, councillors, and wider community, to develop knowledge, skills and understanding to better meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals</p> <p><i>Priority Activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance, for inclusive communication based on Scottish Government's Accessible communication guidance and promote good practice • Develop inclusive communication training and evaluate impact • Develop a mandatory training package to increase awareness of neurodiversity • Review and update training for people working with children and young people who are neurodiverse • Pilot and promote neurodiversity awareness training modules to ensure impact by targeting a cross section of staff from all services • Offer access to neurodiversity training to community groups • Gather feedback on actions periodically from those with lived experience 	Corporate – HR

For further information, or to request this document in an alternative format e.g. large print or suitable language, please contact:

Highland Council, Equal Opportunities

Email equal.opportunities@highland.gov.uk