

Highland Local Child Poverty Action Update Report April 2024 to March 2025

The Approach in Highland

There is a strong commitment in Highland to address poverty and inequality within individual agencies and across the Community Planning Partnership. The vision for the Community Planning Partnership through its Highland Outcome Improvement Plan is:

“Maximise Opportunities and Tackle Inequality to Build a Thriving Highlands for All”

This is underpinned by 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 Highland Community Planning Partnership brings together public agencies, third sector organisations and other key community groups to work collaboratively with the people of Highland to deliver better outcomes.

The Highland Community Planning Partnership works strategically at a Highland level, through a series of nine geographical local Community Partnerships as well as regional thematic groups. Ultimately these deliver our Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan sets out the vision, purpose and focus for the Highland Community Planning Partnership from 2024-2027. The partnership believes working towards this plan will have a significant impact on reducing inequalities in Highland.

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

Our 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. Our 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.

Our 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.

Highland's Integrated Children's Services Board provides oversight to the on-going work of the plan. This group has broad membership, including lead officers from The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and a number of Third Sector organisations. The



Board reports to the Community Planning Partnership Board with additional reporting to Highland Council and NHS Highland Board.

The process to review the Integrated Children's Services Plan (ICSP) began during 2022/23. [A Strategic Needs Assessment](#) was undertaken to create the evidence base for the new plan. Child Poverty remains a core priority of the ICSP and the actions developed through that process are reflected in section three as actions for 2023/24 – 2025/6. The Integrated Children's Service Annual Report for 2024-2025 can be found [here](#)

A life courses approach has been taken to the plan and actions are structured under three life course stages: **Getting Started** (pre-birth to school), **Growing Up** (primary) and **Moving On** (secondary to young adult).

Section 1: Background and Context

1.1 Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

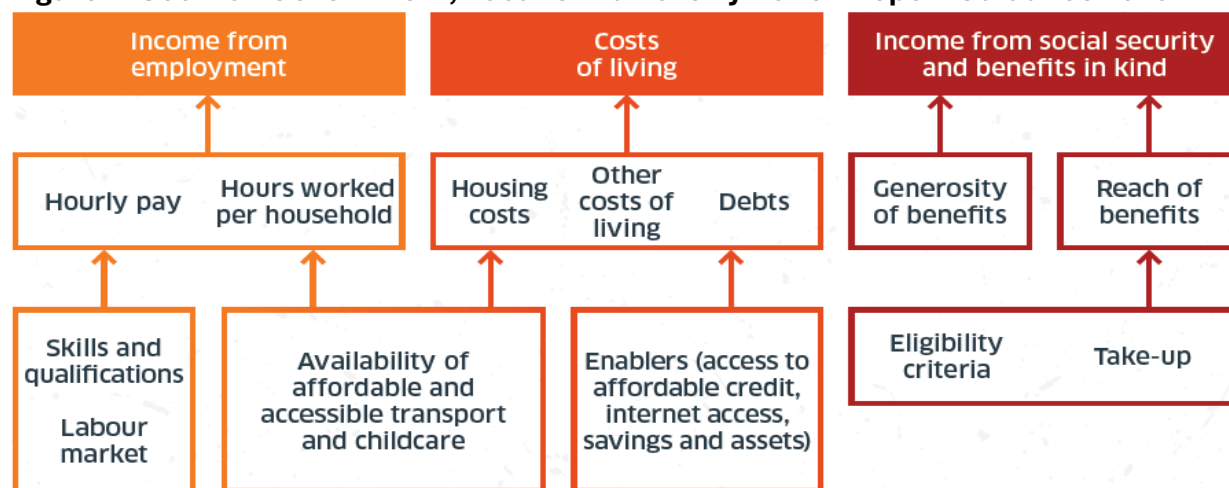
In 2017, the Scottish Government introduced the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act](#). This replaced the previous UK Child Poverty Act 2010 and included duties on both the Scottish Government and local partners to address child poverty. It also introduced income targets as a driver for reducing child poverty across Scotland. Child poverty can have negative effects on the health, wellbeing and educational attainment of the children who experience it. It also has a wider cost for society¹. By introducing a Child Poverty Act, which sets out clear targets for reducing the number of children living in poverty, progress can be monitored on meeting these targets.

The legislation requires:

- The Scottish Government to produce a Child Poverty Delivery Plan every four years highlighting how it intends to meet the child poverty targets laid out in the Act. It must also publish annual progress reports setting out progress towards meeting the child poverty targets. The Scottish Government's second Delivery Plan – [Best Start Bright Futures](#), sets out policies and proposals to help reach the child poverty targets set for 2030.
- Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports which set out activities that have been undertaken in the Local Authority area during the previous year to reduce child poverty and contribute to the delivery of the national targets and any planned future activities.

Evidence suggests that there are three key drivers which influence the experience of child poverty. These are income from employment, costs of living and income from social security and benefits. These drivers are set out in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Scottish Government, Local Child Poverty Action Report Guidance 2018



Increasing incomes and reducing costs of living are mechanisms for reducing child poverty but there are many other actions that take place to improve children's quality of life and life chances.

¹ A 2023 study found that child poverty in the UK was costing over £39 billion a year - <https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-child-poverty-2023#:~:text=In%202008%2C%20the%20total%20cost,cost%20could%20be%20substantially%20higher.>

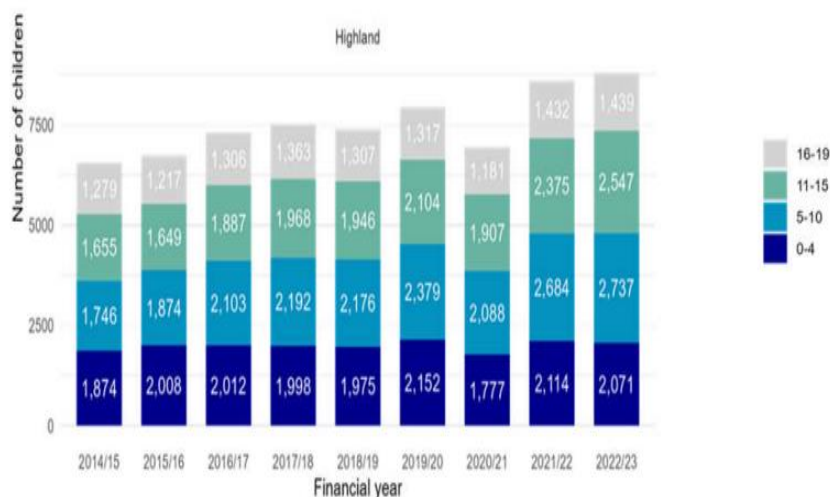
1.2 Child Poverty in Highland

There is a large body of evidence that poverty harms children's health, wellbeing and educational opportunities. Rural and island life characteristics are recognised as potential compounders of low earning and higher cost of living.

In 2022/23, 7,355 children under 16 lived in low-income families below the poverty line in Highland

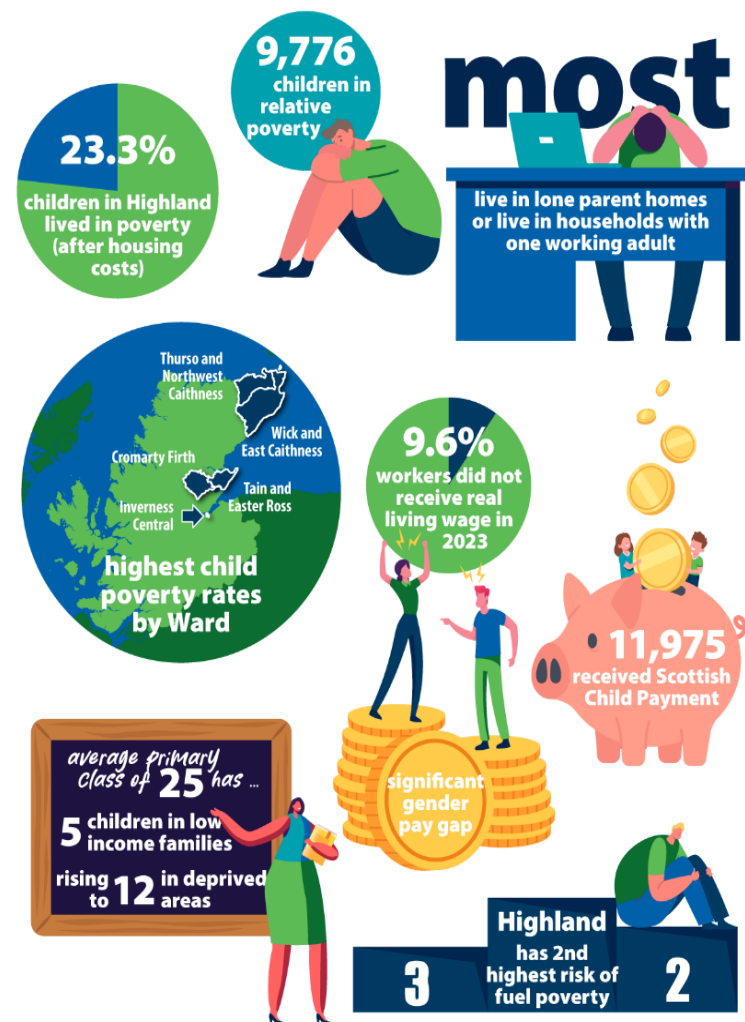
Nationally, six in ten children in poverty live in households where someone is working. In-work poverty remains more common than out-of-work poverty in all areas.

Figure 3: Number of children in low-income families in Highland



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

Nearly three-quarters of people experiencing in-work poverty have someone in their family who works in five high-priority industries: hospitality, health and social care, retail, administrative support and manufacturing. Many of these industries are large employers in Highland with a high proportion of part-time workers and seasonal variation.

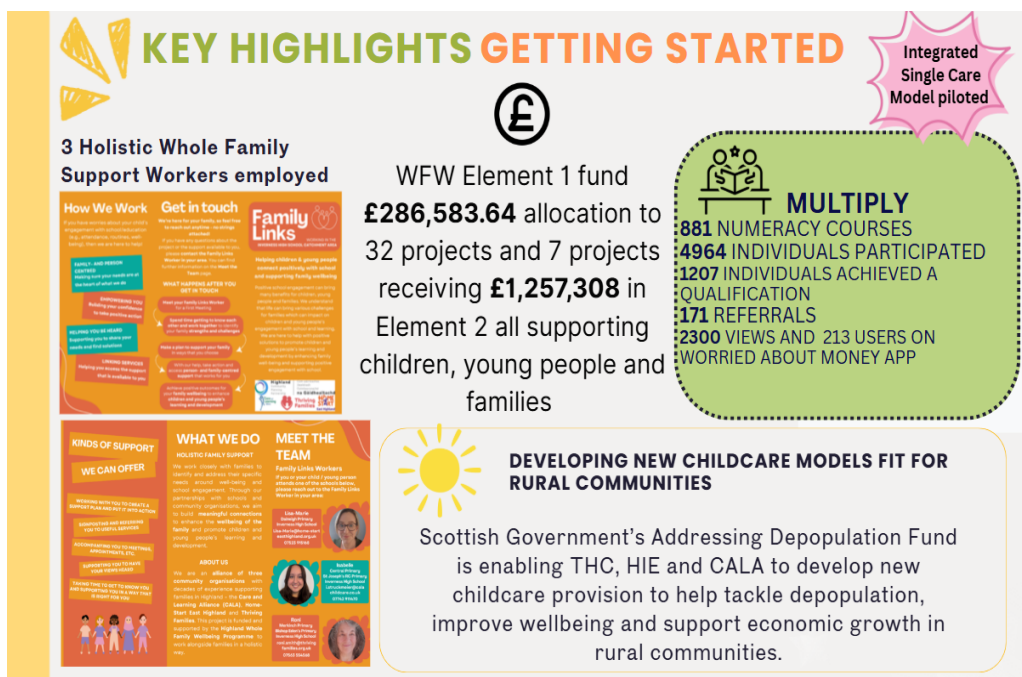
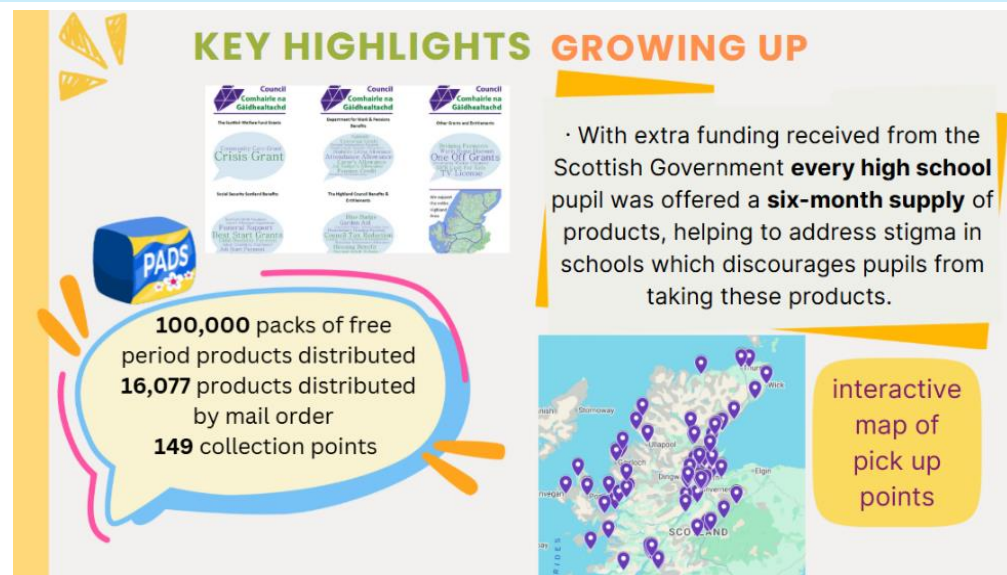


Full, recent data set on Child Poverty available in Appendix

1.3 Summary of Actions carried out in 2024-2025

The actions to address Child Poverty in 2024/25 are outlined below and reflect those agreed as part of the new Integrated Children's Service's Plan 2023-2026, where one of the core priorities is Child Poverty. Child Poverty has been a core priority of the Integrated Children's Service's Plan since 2021 however the actions identified for the 2024/25 plan reflect the life courses approach taken throughout the whole plan. This reflects a new approach for the child poverty action plan.

The partnership actions to address child poverty are aligned to the Integrated Children's Plan and are reported as part of the Integrated Children's Service Plan monitoring.



Section 2: Action in Highland – What have we done to address Child Poverty in 2024/25

Theme 1: Getting Started - Pre-birth – 5 years

Improvement priority:

We will reduce the financial barriers in order to increase participation, raise aspirations and address the impacts of poverty.

1.1 Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas

What we said we would do in 2024/25

- Develop and pilot an Integrated Single Care Model (SCM) in one or 2 areas in Highland.
- Continue to push for flexibility and a rural childcare approach/policy including childminding
- Provide a toolkit of flexible childcare options for rural communities
- Develop and deliver the parental employability programme
- Plan and develop a pilot for the Caithness area for childcare to support parents who want to undertake work experience. Local employers will be approached to partake in this pilot.

What we did

- Funding secured from Scottish Government Addressing Depopulation Action Plan fund enabled Highland Council (THC), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), and CALA to collaborate with consultants to develop business plans for new childcare models. Models aim to provide flexible and affordable childcare in rural communities, supporting parental employment and addressing underemployment in key sectors.
- Business plan submitted to the Scottish Government's ADAP team at the end of April 25.
- Evidence report prepared and submitted to Ministers Ms Don-Innes (Children, Young People and the Promise) and Ms Todd (Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport) to support the case for regulatory change. Report has been endorsed by HIREP and its childcare sub-committee and was discussed at CoHI.
- Progress continues on the development and piloting of an Integrated Single Care Model (SCM) in Highland. The initiative now transitioning into the development and implementation phase, with two pathway communities identified. Community engagement is planned as part of the next steps.
- Positive engagement with regulatory agencies and the Scottish Government, who are supportive of the initiative. However, further legal advice from the Care Inspectorate is still awaited.
- CALA presented on the SCM at the CPP Conference and will collaborate with THC and HIE to submit a follow-up report to the next CPP meeting. This report will outline key asks to help address barriers and support the next phase of implementation.
- Toolkit developed of flexible childcare options for rural communities

- Parental employability programme – see section 3 for update

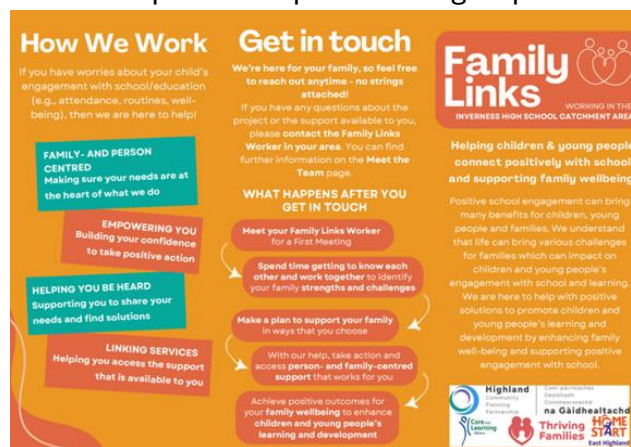
1.2 Implement the Whole Family Approach to mitigate the impacts of poverty

Whole Family Wellbeing Programme fund:

- Allocate Element 1 funding
- Building Linkages between schools
- Recruit Holistic Whole Family Support Workers
- Pilot service to person approaches within Local areas

Whole Family Wellbeing Programme fund: Building Linkages between schools and local food provision

- Partnership formed between CALA, Thriving Families and Home-Start East Highland to provide Holistic Whole Family Support through a Home-School Link model within the Inverness High School ASG area.
- Three Holistic Whole Family Support Workers are now recruited to post, each provider hosting one post across the alliance. This is a significant step forward with the first Programme led, Holistic Whole Family Support worker posts commencing in Highland
- WFW local partnership networks groups established all 9 Community Partnership Areas.



Element 1 Fund (£286,583.64), a total of 32 projects funded across Highland tackling poverty and inequalities by providing support and wellbeing activities to reach the six priority family group.

Element 2 Fund (£1,257,308.00) has been awarded to the following organisations/partnerships:

- **Thriving Families**
 - To make a significant contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs across Highland. This will be achieved by increasing the

holistic, flexible, tailored, one-to-one support available to families and their wider circles of support by expanding the capacity of Thriving Families to deliver this support across Highland.

- **Autism and Neurodiversity North Scotland**

- Implementation of a leading neurodiverse specific facility in Dingwall, from which newly recruited and trained A-ND staff will deliver specialised neurodiverse specific Outreach Support Services and a Day Care of Children Services, which includes a playscheme and afterschool club for neurodiverse children and young people.

- **Kooth**

- For the past 12 months Kooth have been funded from the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme fund. As the contract has reached renewal a solution was sought for future funding for the contract. The Change Leadership Group have agreed that the CYP Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund will be utilised to cover the 12-month contract for Kooth for FY 2025/2026. Kooth provides anonymous on-line therapeutic content and activities, peer support which is pre-moderated to ensure safety and professional support through asynchronous messaging and live chat functionality.

- **Contextual Safeguarding Project**

- The Contextual Safeguarding Project is a partnership between Action for Children, Barnardos, The Anchor Project, Police Scotland and Highland Child Protection Committee. The multi-agency team will be co-located in Rail House, Inverness alongside existing Action for Children and Anchor spaces. This will enable improved collaborative working and a ‘four rooms’ approach for families in a single setting (this will be replicated in buildings across Highland which have been created using Bairns’ Hoose standards). The project will be supported by an Exploitation Steering Group to continue to develop contextual safeguarding approaches for children and young people at risk of community harm.
- The project has been developed using the Scottish Approach to Service Design methodology using the voices of practitioners and young people, as well as self-evaluation and wider quality assurance work. It was also developed in response to the Inspection of Children’s Services for children at risk of harm in 2022 where responses to community harm were highlighted as an area for improvement.

- The funding for this project will come from 3 sources – Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, Bairns’ Hoose funding (through Child Protection Committee) and Whole Family Wellbeing Programme. This demonstrates the key elements required to address Exploitation through a Holistic Contextual Safeguarding approach.
- The project aims to bring together and scale up existing programmes to support young people affected by community harm and in particular, those at risk of Exploitation. Community harm can include risks relating to exploitation, youth justice, drugs and alcohol, harmful sexual behaviour and regular missing episodes. To date, the project has established that many young people accessing the services have multiple vulnerabilities within the community, often being on the edge of justice services, whilst being victims of Exploitation.
- Whilst specialist services can provide intensive and direct support to the young person, support for families (and the wider community) to help reduce the risks and vulnerabilities is required to avoid an escalation of harm, and prevent young people being removed from their family and/or Highland for their own safety.
- At present, Side-Step and RISE are offered as two distinct services along with support from Youth Action, HOST and ISS. This project aims to create an overarching Contextual Safeguarding Framework with a joined-up service to enable seamless support for young people and their families. This meets the Bairns’ Hoose standards of having a ‘four rooms’ approach in one space – families should not have to seek out support, the support should be brought to them in a comfortable and safe setting.
- **Seasons for Growth**
 - Seasons for Growth is a small group change, loss and bereavement programme that is delivered across Highland, mostly within a school setting. It is a universal small group, psychoeducational intervention which supports children and young people (and their families) who are experiencing significant change or loss, which ideally would be available to all families across Highland. Where there is capacity and the programme has become embedded, children and young people self-refer to the group due to hearing about it via assemblies, from staff in their school or their peers recommending it to them.
 - A variety of staff from a range of professions have attended two-day training to deliver the CYP Programme and some who have furthered that training and attended a one-day Parent Programme Training, allowing them to deliver small group programmes to Parents

too. There are 237 trained CYP companions, of which 29 have gone on to train in the Parent Programme. These staff are predominantly Highland Council employees, based in our schools and across Health & Social Care. There are a further 20 staff trained in the Third Sector in organisations such as Young Carers and the Ministry of Defence.

- To develop this further, plans exist to enable support for staff from partner agencies to undertake the CYP Programme training and deliver a group so that they can become accredited in the CYP programme which in turn would allow them to train to deliver the Parent Programme. This would create capacity in the system.
- **Infant Feeding Support Worker/NNU/Maternity Project**
 - Aims to provide holistic whole family support in both the NNU and children's ward, providing specialist breastfeeding input to every family who needs that support at the right time to fulfil the child's right to optimal nutrition in turn giving the most associated short- and long-term health benefits.
- **Infant Feeding Support Worker/CALA Project**
 - Is a collaborative project in partnership with NHSH Infant Feeding Support Worker team and CALA. This will ensure that women are supported by NHS Infant feeding support workers to improve breastfeeding outcomes but also ensure that groups are available in all areas of Highland providing continued feeding support but widening this to relationship building, play and nurture.

Employability

- Develop and implement a pilot project aimed at progressing unemployed parents in the Wick area into employment, with the SCQF Level 4/5 Employability Award re-designed for adults at its heart and with input from local employers throughout. Childcare, transport, lunch, and all materials will be provided to enable attendance. If successful, the plan would be to roll

Home Start Caithness have started to deliver the initial phase of the project, providing employability support to a group of parents in Wick. The next phase of the project will be to conduct a survey amongst a wider cohort of parents to help determine demand and identified needs. A key ambition for the project is to help parents achieve work readiness and connect them with local employers.

out the programme to other towns across Highland.

Multiply

- Further delivery of projects across the Highlands and sessions to boost numeracy confidence in everyday life ranging from outdoor family fun days to weekly activities within highlife libraries for families to explore everyday numeracy through games, crafts and play. Introduce additional evening classes to achieve maths qualifications and develop digital tools to support learning

Multiply activity (2023-2025)

- The Multiply interventions delivered support to those over 16, helping improve their functional numeracy skills through free personal tutoring and digital training. The Multiply programme had contracts with 12 providers across Highland to deliver a range of initiatives.
- These providers support a range of individuals, including young people who are at risk of being left behind as a result of their personal challenges, those with disabilities and those facing poverty, homelessness and long-term unemployment.
- Courses delivered included those designed to increase confidence in numbers, encourage people to upskill to access jobs/careers and use numeracy to manage money. There was also targeted support to prisoners or those recently released and their families to enhance numeracy skills and give the best chance for community re-integration.
- As part of The Highland Council's proactive approach to achieving positive outcomes in this area, Highland Multiply projects were offered a 2 month extension to February 2025 which enabled continued delivery. Multiply provider reporting indicates that the outputs delivered significantly exceed the original targets, and these outputs are summarised as follows:-
 - 881 adult numeracy courses were run in Highland through Multiply
 - 4,964 individuals participated in Multiply funded courses
 - 1,207 individuals achieved a qualification
 - 171 individuals were referred from partners onto upskill courses
- To continue the legacy of Multiply, UHI North, West and Hebrides launched a free online resource to help people build confidence with their numeracy skills which the Highland Council actively promoted internally and via social media. The [Multiply Highland](#) online resource is a series of short interactive modules based on real-life numeracy scenario challenges, such as adding up a bill or reading a pay slip. They are aimed at adults looking to develop number confidence for work, career progression, budgeting, or everyday life.

1.3 Develop financial inclusion pathways

- Adapt Food Insecurity Pathway for families with infants to access emergency formula milk.
 - Provide Access to emergency funds for families in remote and rural areas and explore cash first approaches.
 - Explore what measures can be put in place to provide assurance on the delivery of the FI Pathway
 - Cash first approaches are difficult in remote and rural areas. Argyll and Bute have newly developed, an emergency voucher scheme which may be able to be adapted for North Highland and provide a solution. Explore other models of good practice in remote and rural areas to support cash first approaches. Update The Highland Information Trail.
 - Provide information on the maternity section of the NHS Highland website. This will enable the information to be reviewed/updated every quarter.
- The Food Insecurity (FI) Pathway in Highland continues to build on the previously funded referral model between the Highland Council's Welfare Support Team and Health Visitors, which has successfully supported families with income maximisation and benefit checks.
 - A Steering Group has been established to advance the FI Pathway, currently focusing on gathering data on user experiences and the distribution of formula across Highland. HALO has joined the group and will lead service delivery in the region, with funding to be secured through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP).
 - The current Welfare Advice and Health Partnership (WAHP), funded until March 2025, continues to operate in rural GP practices and will remain active based on demand.
 - Additionally, the Welfare Support Team has been providing fortnightly support at Dingwall and Invergordon Job Centres throughout 2024, focusing on financial checks, particularly for disability-related claims. Portree and Fort William Job Centres began receiving this support from 4 February 2025.

Develop financial inclusion (FI) pathways

- FI pathways between the HC Welfare Support Team & Health Visitors continue to go from strength to strength with the Welfare Support team assisting families with income maximisation and benefit checks.
- Improvement services pathway – Welfare Advice and Health partnership (WAHP) HC welfare support team are present at various GP practices across rural Highland.
- Job Centre Plus – Welfare support present weekly/fortnightly in Dingwall, Invergordon, Portree and Fort William Job centres assisting families with financial checks, disabilities reviews and appeals.
- New on-line referral route for schools directly into Welfare support to assist with families facing crisis. Being rolled out May/June to Headteacher/guidance teacher team meetings

Theme 2: Growing Up – Primary Years

Improvement priority:

Mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis

2.1 Increase the uptake of sanitary products in schools and other public sector facilities.

What we said we would do in 2024/25

- Ensure free period products are available in Highland to everyone who needs them.
- Raise awareness of how to access free period products through community collection, schools or home delivery run by Highland Council or through GP distribution model run by Health Information Service (HIRS)
- Increase in product take-up from young people

What we did

- Team attended various events across the summer including Belladrum Music Festival, Inverness Highland Games, Pop up shops in Eastgate Centre, Vision 26 at Inverness Leisure Centre with over 100,000 packs of free period products distributed
- 16,077 products were distributed by mail order in 2024/25
- 149 collection points have been established around Highland, including GP Surgeries, Community Centres and Highland Council service points. A map of all locations can be found here [Map - Pickup Locations](#)
- A variety of products can be ordered from the Highland Council Website and delivered by mail for those who are unable to attend at a collection point
- There is significant demand in populated areas with existing collection points but a lower uptake in rural areas.
- With extra funding received from the Scottish Government every high school pupil was offered a six-month supply of products, helping to address stigma in schools which discourages pupils from taking these products.

2.2 Roll out cost of the school day toolkit

- Increase the number of schools using the toolkit
- Education Scotland Attainment Officer continues to progress Cost of the School Day programme, including meetings with Head Teachers to share good practice. Further update will be available in 2025/26 report.

Theme 3: Moving On – Secondary and Young Adulthood

Improvement Priority:

We will raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap

3.1 Raise awareness of the impact of poverty amongst children and young people

What we said we would do in 2024/25

- Develop and pilot a Money Counts 3 course designed to support teams and services to become more poverty sensitive
- Undertake a 3-6 month post evaluation survey for those attending the course
- Improve our shared understanding and use of data
- Embed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Whole Family Wellbeing Strategic Assessment

What we did

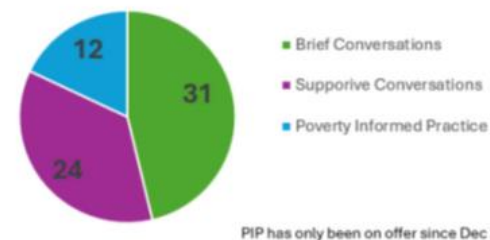
Money Counts Training

This continues to be offered as a means of increasing the number and quality of conversations around money worries. The training highlights the “Worrying About Money?” leaflet and app as tools to support individuals access a range of appropriate support services and organisations.

Money Counts Training delivered since April 24:

- 5 Brief Conversations (Money Counts 1) courses
- 4 Supportive Conversations (Money Counts 2) courses
- Poverty Informed Practice (Money Counts 3) course was developed in 24/25 and is designed to support services to be more poverty sensitive. 2 courses run in 24/25
- Positive feedback from evaluation included: “training was useful to think about language”; “when checklist was used within a service it was thought provoking”.

Money Counts Training Participant Numbers 2024 - 2025



Improve our understanding and use of data

Data Group has been established as part of PRG. Feedback from the Improvement Service suggests a need to ensure that data is used to identify priorities and actions. Work is underway to explore data requirements regarding health inequalities and the development of a dashboard to monitor progress at

HCPP level. Important to ensure that info is shared and relevant. Potential for a data hub to support work across the CPP priorities.

Embed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Whole Family Wellbeing Strategic Assessment

Collection of feedback from families and lived experience to find out what worked, what didn't, how things could be improved. This will support future planning within the Poverty Reduction Delivery Group

3.2 Roll out the Family First approach

- Reduce the numbers of children in external residential provision
- Increase the proportion of children in kinship care
- Increase the number of foster carers
- Increase community services and supports
- Implement the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme in Highland.

The most effective protection of children involves early support within the family, before urgent action is needed. In Highland, this relates to the 'Family First' approach and the Whole Family Wellbeing programme. If children do require placement away from home, real protection involves attuned, trauma-informed and sufficiently sustained support towards reunification, or towards an alternative secure home base when this is not possible.

Reduce the numbers of children in external residential provision

The numbers of placements outwith Highland were at the lowest level ever recorded at 9 placements in Oct 2023 but have since increased again to 17, 2 placements above the target. This is a result of several larger families coming into spot purchased residential care and a number of young people with needs and behaviour that required specialist placements outwith Highland. Work is continually targeted through the Home to Highland Programme to reduce the number of children in residential placements outwith Highland.

Increase the proportion of children in kinship care

The lack of increase in overall figures underlies plans to develop a specific Kinship Team to find family members, assess potential carers and offer support thereafter. Proposals have been submitted in respect of this. Whilst the number of children looked after in kinship has not risen in line with the target, there has been an increase of children living in kinship arrangements under a residence order. In June 2024 there were 135 children across 100 households that had residence orders, an increase of 12 from the previous year. These children are cared for by friends & family, but they are not officially classed as looked after children by the Scottish Government in data returns.

Increase the number of foster carers

Family First Strategy is about supporting children to remain at home with their parents, where this is safe to do so, and by providing additional support and scaffolding to families who might need this at different times, to ensure their children's wellbeing and safety is supported. Fostering is an integral part of the Family First strategy and for this to be a success the service needs to retain the current cohort of carers and recruit many more for children and young people of all ages so that we increase the number of local foster placements available for alternative Family-Based Care. Highland Council continues efforts to recruit new Foster careers including supporting Foster Care Fortnight (13-16 May 2024) with a series of online information sessions to encourage new foster carers.

3.3 Identify way to provided targeted support within universal services.

- Deliver 8 Money Counts courses to 40 people over the course of the year-through NHS Highland Public Health training programme.
- Distribute around 1500 IFAN Worrying About Money leaflets in 24/25 to those in need of financial support

Worrying About Money leaflets/ WAM app

- **1517 WAM leaflets distributed in 24/25** by the Health Improvement Resource Service (does not include downloads of the online version)
- Figures for the WAM app for 2024 indicate 2.4k views in the year, 218 active users (including 48 new users) and average engagement time of 2 mins 05 sec.
- This provides a helpful baseline for updates of figures in 2025. The annual review of the app has been completed.

Employability

- Aim to work with 300 parents on their journey towards employment
- Identify parents that could benefit from offers from employability service.
- Support private sector take on employability clients in-work progression
- Launch WorkLifeHighland.co.uk
- Develop further links between NESH employability plans and HC to



support young people and parents into employment.

Aim to work with 300 parents on their journey towards employment

Highland Council Employability team supported 266 parents in 24/25. 175 were out-of-work parents and 91 were in-work parents seeking to improve their labour market position.

Identify parents that could benefit from offers from employability service.

The Employability Child Poverty Co-ordinator (ECPC) continues to engage with Job Centre and CAB staff across Highland to identify parents that could benefit from employability support.

Support private sector take on employability clients in-work progression

A full-time Employer Engagement officer has been appointed to the team and is working closely with employer organisations including Chambers of Commerce, FSB, DYW and Business Gateway and individual businesses of varying sizes - to ensure a stronger connection with employability clients.

Launch WorkLifeHighland.co.uk

www.worklifehighland.co.uk is now up and running and accompanied by an active social media presence using the WLH brand. To date 3,600 individuals have visited the site since the launch in October 2024.

Develop further links between NHS employability plans and HC to support young people and parents into employment.

NHSH and HC have been working closely over the last few months with members of the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP). A “Fast Track to a New Career in Care” recruitment in Fort William on 9th April was supported by several HEP partners, including HC. The event allowed candidates to discover the range of posts on offer, receive help with completing their application and be interviewed – all on the same day. 20+ candidates inc. young people and parents secured employment because of the event.

Section 3: What are we planning to do to address Child Poverty in 2025/26

In the final year of the current Highland Local Child Poverty Action Plan 2023-26 we will continue to deliver actions to address Child Poverty according to the life courses approach outlined below, reflecting priorities agreed as part of the Integrated Children's Service's Plan 2023-2026, where one of the core priorities is Child Poverty. Further detail is given below.

Getting Started Pre-birth – 5 years	Growing Up Primary Years	Moving On: Secondary/Young Adulthood
1.1 Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas	2.1 Increase the uptake of sanitary products in schools and other public sector facilities.	3.1 Raise awareness of the impact of poverty amongst children and young people
1.2 Implement the Whole Family Approach to mitigate the impacts of poverty	2.2 Roll out cost of the school day toolkit	3.2 Roll out the Family First approach
1.3 Develop financial inclusion pathways		3.3 Identify way to provided targeted support within universal services.

Preparing for the 2026-2031 Highland Local Child Poverty Action Plan

Work has started on developing the next Local Child Poverty Action Plan. With support from the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland, the Highland Poverty Reduction Delivery Group partners completed a self-assessment survey. The results were collated in a report and examined at a workshop held in May 2025 which resulted in three improvement statements to help the group start to develop the 2026-31 Plan:

- Work with those with Lived Experience, specifically identified priority groups, to help to identify gaps and priorities for improvement and to work together to design solutions.
- Work in partnership with other services and partners to develop a shared understanding of current needs and existing actions to address poverty.
- Be data informed in identifying need and measuring success/progress.

The Poverty Reduction Delivery Group is now focusing on how to deliver these improved approaches to understanding and addressing child poverty in Highland.

With reference to the 26-31 Plan, while the Scottish Government's child poverty targets, the 6 priority family groups and addressing the drivers of poverty remain central to the approach in Highland, the 2026-31 plan is likely to take a broader view than the current plan, to include a wider range of issues that drive child and family poverty including housing, transport and rurality, and to engage with a wider range of partners across the public, private and third sectors. The broader approach will also allow the Poverty Reduction Delivery Group partners to be more responsive, giving space for those with lived experiences to influence partners' responses to addressing poverty; to better understand what the data is telling us; and to respond to the findings and challenges posed by the recently announced Highland Poverty Commission.

Theme 1: Getting Started Pre-birth – 5 years	
Improvement priority: We will Reduce the Financial Barriers in Order to Increase Participation, Raise Aspirations and Address the Impacts of Poverty.	
Actions	Priority Actions for 2025/26
1.1 Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas	• Develop and pilot an Integrated Single Care Model (SCM) in one or two areas in Highland. • Continue to push for flexibility and a rural childcare approach/policy including childminding • Roll out toolkit of flexible childcare options for rural communities • Continue to develop and deliver the parental employability programme and linking into childcare work experience opportunities where appropriate
1.2 Implement the Whole Family Approach to mitigate the impacts of poverty	Whole Family Wellbeing Programme • Continue the WFWP funding strategy through WFWP Locality Coordinators working in 9 local partnership groups across Highland to support services that address the needs of the 6 priority family types. The Tier 1 (£10K) and Tier 2 (2 x £50K per local partnership) funding streams are both open on a rolling programme. • Promote the WFWP self-assessment toolkit as a tool for partners to help improve and align their services and activities with child poverty reduction priorities. The tool will also provide useful intelligence on community activity across Highland • Building on three Inverness High School pilot, develop the Family Links future operation model through schools and/or communities in partnership with the third sector

	Employability • HomeStart Caithness have started to deliver the initial phase of the Wick Employability pilot project, providing employability support to a group of parents in Wick. The next phase will be to conduct a survey amongst a wider cohort of parents to help determine demand and identified needs. A key ambition for the project is to help parents achieve work readiness and connect them with local employers. • The Employability and Whole Family Well-being teams continue to work together on a range of activities. Community engagement activity has progressed in collaboration with the recently appointed HTSI Employability Development Officer. A key part of this work is to promote Work. Life. Highland to groups across the Highland, encourage them to promote the service to potential clients and discuss possible future engagement events.
1.3 Develop financial inclusion pathways	• Adapt FI Pathway for families with infants to access emergency formula milk. • Develop a route to access emergency funds for families in remote and rural areas and explore cash first approaches. • Explore what measures can be put in place to provide assurance on the delivery of the FI Pathway • Cash first approaches are difficult in remote and rural areas. Argyll and Bute have newly developed, an emergency voucher scheme which may be able to be adapted for North Highland and provide a solution. Explore other models of good practice in remote and rural areas to support cash first approaches. • Update The Highland Information Trail. • Provide information on the maternity section of the NHS Highland website. This will enable the information to be reviewed/updated every quarter.

Theme 2: Growing Up – Primary Years

Improvement priority: Mitigate the Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Actions	Priority Actions for 2025/26
2.1 Increase the uptake of sanitary products in schools and other public sector facilities.	• Increasing reach by encouraging community collection and working with partners to help with delivery of products including social work, homeless teams, Council building receptions • Period Poverty team will attend Head Teachers meeting to gather feedback • Get feedback from pupils especially about reducing stigma/ embarrassment as project still receiving many online orders from pupils. • Explore use of QR codes which pupils can scan and place an order for products which is then sent back to the school in discreet packaging for the pupil to collect.
2.2 Roll out cost of the school day toolkit	• Increase the number of schools using the toolkit

Theme 3: Moving On: Secondary and Young Adulthood

Improvement priority: We will Raise Attainment and Close the Poverty Related Attainment Gap

Actions	Priority Actions for 2025/26
3.1 Raise awareness of the impact of poverty amongst children and young people	• Improve our shared understanding and use of data • Embed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Whole Family Wellbeing Strategic Assessment
3.2 Roll out the Family First approach	• Reduce the numbers of children in external residential provision • Increase the proportion of children in kinship care • Increase the number of foster carers

	• Increase community services and supports • Implement the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme in Highland (see 1.2)
3.3 Identify way to provided targeted support within universal services.	• Continue to deliver Money Counts courses through NHS Highland Public Health training programme which include promotion of the WAM leaflet and app. • Distribute around 1500 IFAN Worrying About Money leaflets in 25/26 to those in need of financial support Employability • In 2025/26 the target is to work with 300 parents, either on their journey towards employment or for those in-work and in receipt of Universal Credit, to potentially improve their household income through employability support. • Employability Child Poverty Co-ordinator in post and will continue working alongside key partners e.g. Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice Scotland, community organisations and employers, to identify and support parents that could benefit from our offers. • Increase awareness of available support will continue primarily through the promotion of Work. Life. Highland on-line and in person. Support includes: help with barrier removal, training and skills development, job search and interview skills, volunteering, paid placements in the public and third sectors, self-employment, support for private sector companies to take on employability clients and in-work progression support. • The Work. Life. Highland website was launched in autumn 2024 and is providing a simple point of entry for potential clients and employers to access information about the employability support available across Highland. The clear call to action in the site is to get in touch and to date we have seen a significant number of people contacting the service via this route. • The Highland Council recently added the role of Employer Engagement Co-ordinator to the Employability team. A key part of the role to date has been to promote flexible working options to employers, including options to help parents enter and remain in the workforce Adult Learning • Highland Council Adult Learning service will offer training in the following areas in 2025/26 ○ Core Skills for Work ○ Money Matters ○ Personal Finance ○ Wellbeing Literacy ○ Family Learning

Appendix – Poverty in Highland

1 *Child Poverty*²

In 2022/23, 13,034 children in NHS Highland (Highland and Argyll and Bute) live in poverty after housing costs. 9,776 of these children live in Highland. This means that they live in a household 60% below the UK median income after deducting housing costs.

The average primary school class of 25 pupils in NHS Highland now has around five children living in low-income families. In some of the most deprived areas, this figure is around 12.

Children are much more likely to be exposed to poverty if they live with a lone parent or if they have two or more siblings. Having someone with long-term illness in the household increases the risk due to barriers to employment and caring demands. Ethnic minorities also have higher child poverty rates.

In the past, childhood poverty was related to unemployment. Increasingly, more poor children live with at least one working parent. The current cost of living crisis is pushing more families into poverty. There is a large body of evidence that poverty harms children's health, wellbeing and educational opportunities, impacting the life course.

Rural and island life characteristics are recognised as potential compounders of the main drivers of child poverty. Income from work and earnings can be seasonal and unpredictable, and living costs can be higher with high levels of fuel poverty, higher prices for goods, and unaffordable housing. Lower take-up of welfare support can be an issue in more rural and remote areas.

Scottish policy measures include support through the benefits system, increased childcare provision, school clothing grants, and free school meals and as part of the Workforce 2030 Vision, transforming the role of school nursing specifically to address the impact of inequalities and child poverty. The Scottish Child Payment was introduced in February 2021. The level has risen to £26.70 a week and was extended to children up to 16 years of age in families receiving means-tested benefits. Families can access means-tested support through Best Start Grants.

Currently, 11,975 children in Highland living in low-income families already receiving qualifying benefits receive the Scottish Child Payment.

² Information extracted from a report produced by the Health intelligence team: NHS Highland. "Child Poverty: Children and young people's health and wellbeing profiles: supplementary report" Publication date: 22nd July 2024. Public Health Intelligence, NHS Highland nhsh.publichealthintelligence@nhs.scot

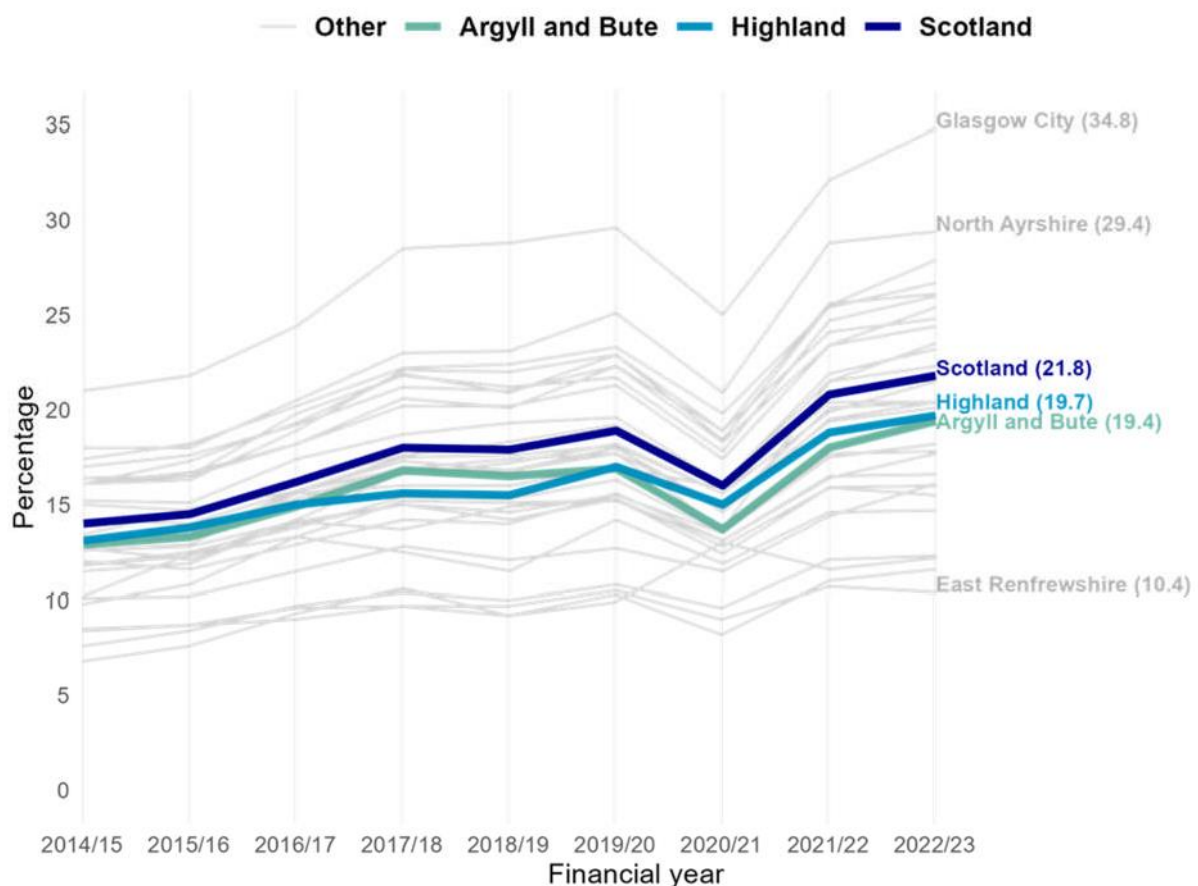
2 Local measures of child poverty

Children in low-income families

The terms low income refers to being below the poverty threshold.

The chart shows the percentage of children under 16 living in families either receiving out-of-work (mean-tested) benefits or tax credits, where their reported income is less than 60 percent of the contemporary UK median income. The Scottish Government recommends this measure of relative poverty to monitor child poverty locally.

Figure 2: Percentage of children in low-income families in Local Authority areas



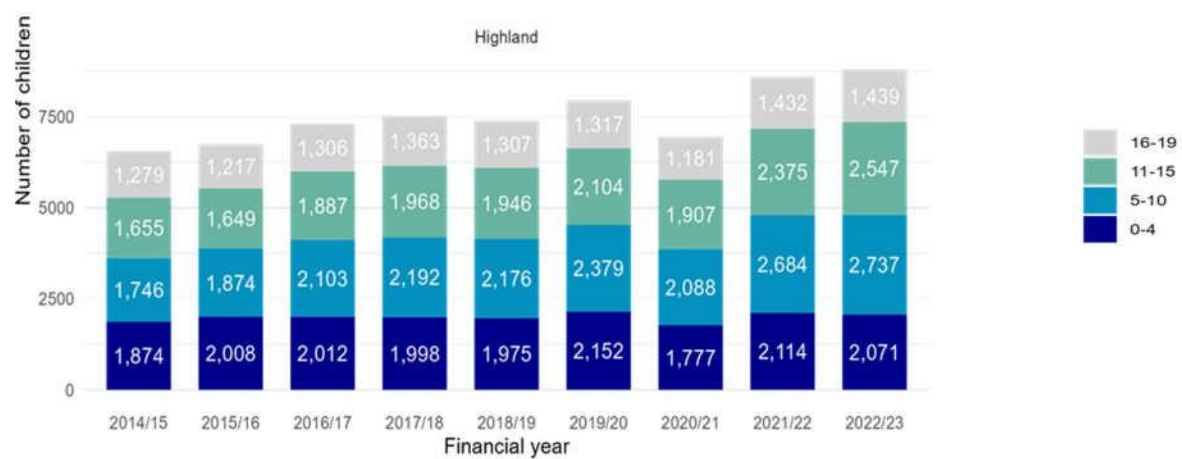
Source: DWP/HMRC children in low-income families local measure (Relative poverty before housing costs).

Whilst the proportion of children in low-income families fell in 2020/21 this was largely due to the additional £20 a week payment added to social security benefits for a six-month period during the pandemic. This uplift stopped in October 2021.

Subsequently, rates have risen again in Highland and Scotland. Slow economic recovery from COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have resulted in rapid and sustained price increases that disproportionately impact low-income families already at risk from food, fuel and transport costs.

In 2022/23, 7,355 children under 16 lived in low-income families below the poverty line in Highland.

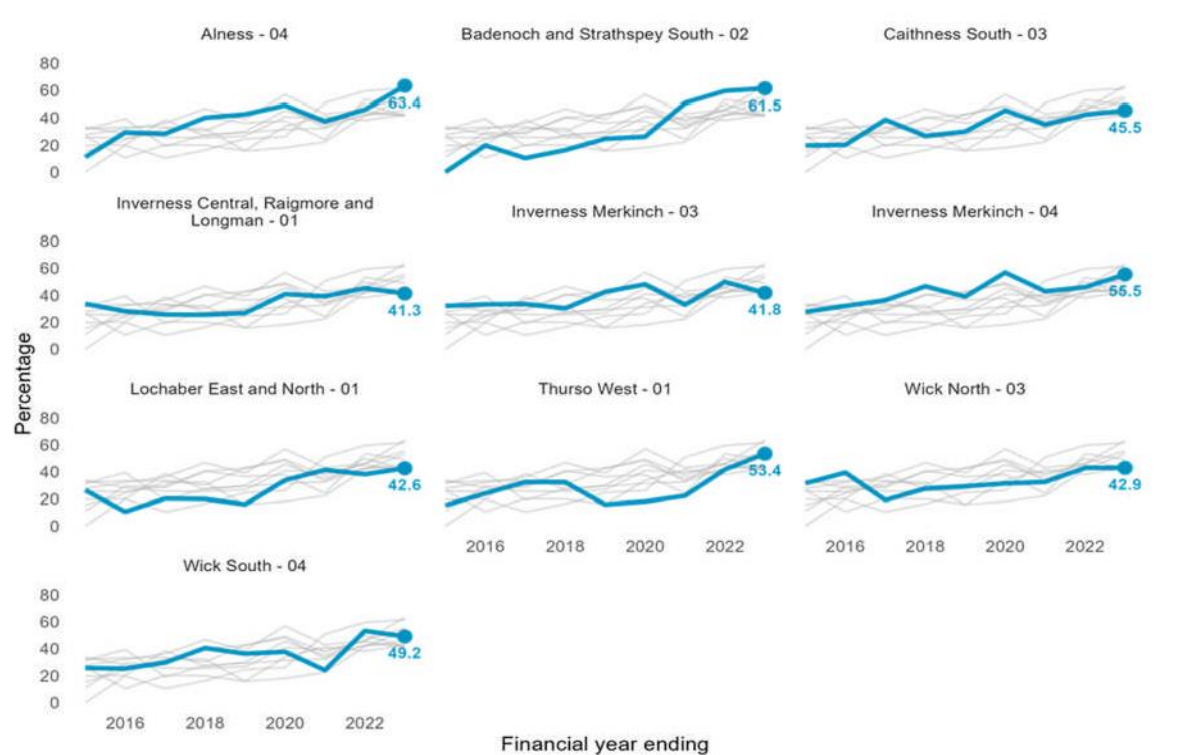
Figure 3: Number of children in low-income families in Highland



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

Figure 4 highlights areas within Highland with high concentrations of children in low-income households. Some caution should be observed when interpreting the data. The focus should be on the overall trend rather than year-on-year change, which is prone to fluctuations in small populations.

Figure 4: Ten small areas in Highland with the highest percentage of children under 16 in low-income households in 2023.



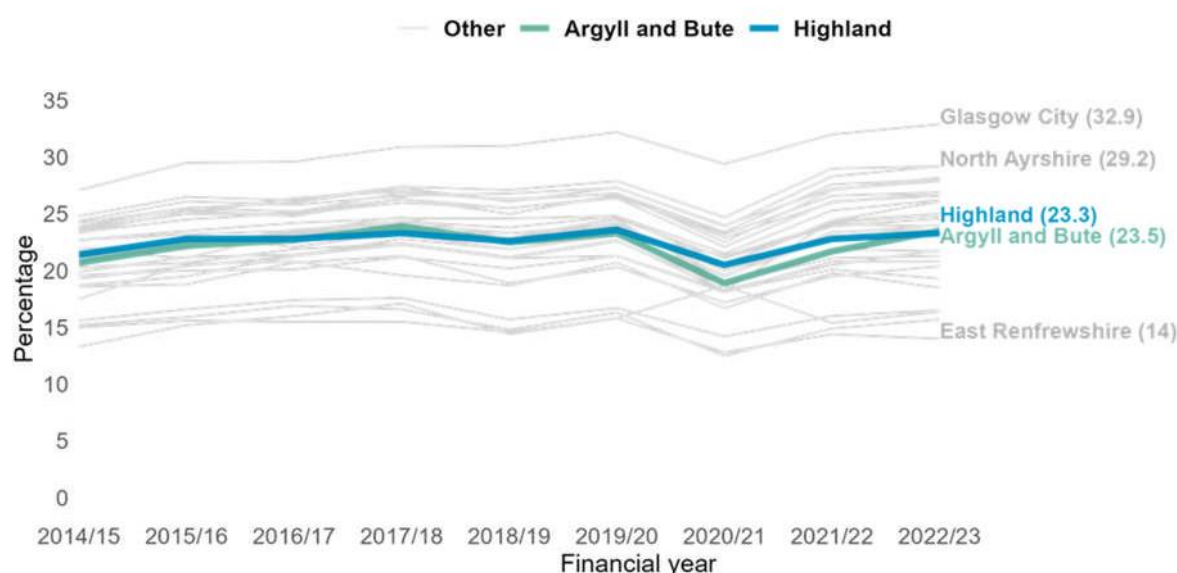
Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 and National Records of Scotland Small Area Population Estimates 2021

Child poverty estimates after housing costs

Child poverty after housing costs are reported using data from the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. The data extends the children in low-income families data published by the Dept of Work and Pensions by including modelling for housing costs for Local Authority areas and parliamentary constituencies. Housing is the biggest outgoing for most families. Consequently, the availability of affordable accommodation can have a big impact on poverty numbers.

In 2022/23, 9,776 children in Highland live in poverty after housing costs.

Figure 5: Percentage of children living in poverty after housing costs by Local Authority area in Scotland



Source: End Child Poverty Coalition estimates of child poverty rates after housing costs (2024) 1 A child is defined as aged under 15, or aged 16-19 and in full-time education.

Working households

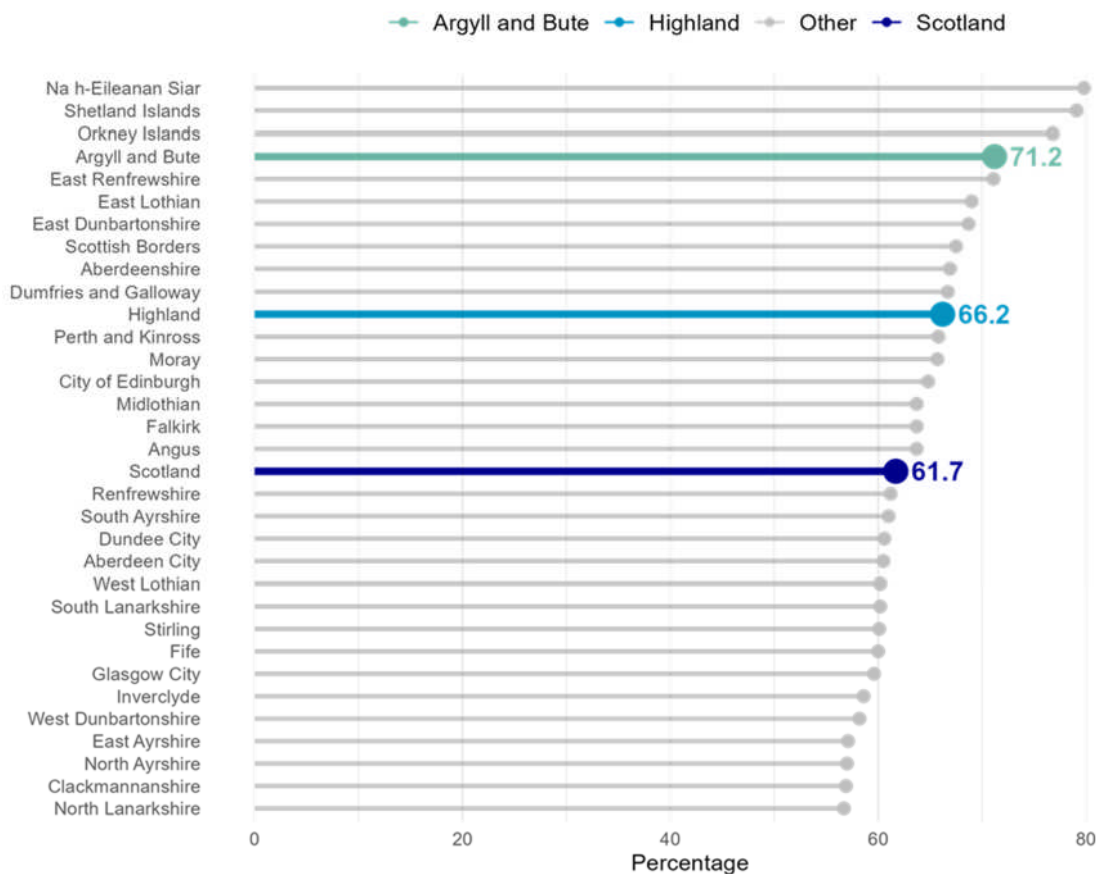
The Department of Work and Pensions data on children in low-income indicates how in-work poverty contributes to overall child poverty in local areas.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of children under 16 in low-income families in a household with at least one adult in work in 2022/23 for the Local Authorities in Scotland. In-work poverty remains more common than out-of-work poverty in all areas.

Six in ten children in poverty live in households where someone is working, and increasingly, only having two parents at work protects against the risk of poverty.

Nearly three-quarters of people experiencing in-work poverty have someone in their family who works in five high-priority industries: hospitality, health and social care, retail, administrative support and manufacturing. Many of these industries are large employers in Highland with a high proportion of part-time workers and seasonal variation in demand.

Figure 6: Percentage of children in poverty before housing costs who are in a household with at least one adult in work by Local Authority area in Scotland in 2022/23.



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

Priority Groups – poverty and protected characteristics

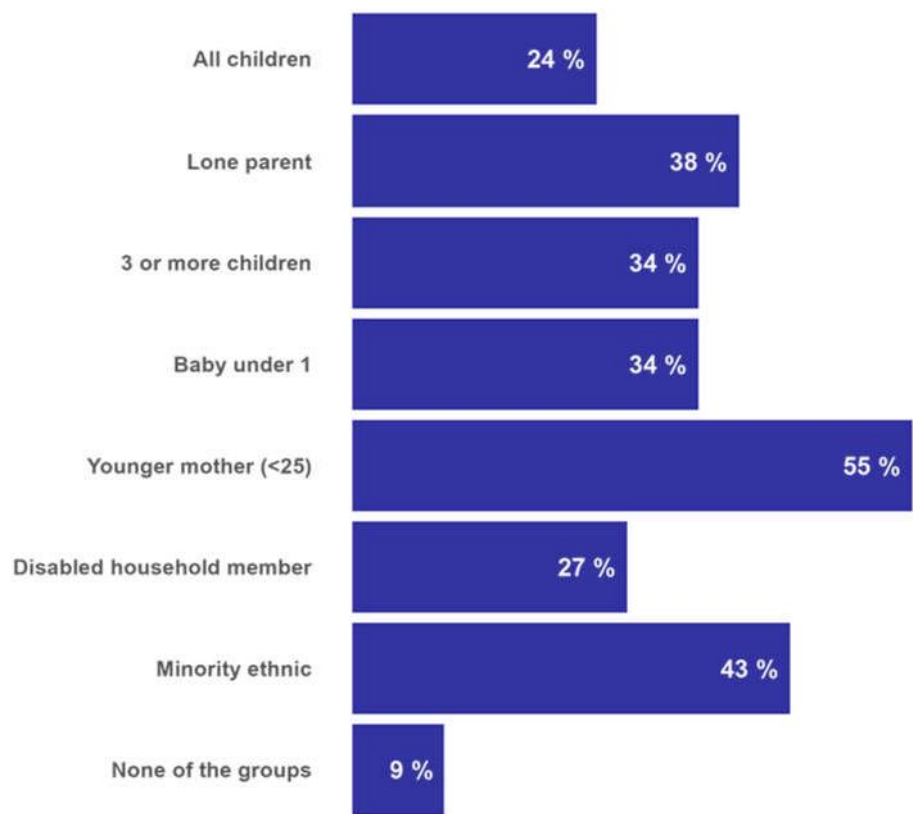
Six groups of priority families are identified as a focus for interventions:

- Lone parent families (majority headed by women)
- Families with a child or adult with a disability
- Larger families with three or more children
- Minority Ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year of age
- Families where the mother is less than 25 years old.

These groupings do not cover all the family types at higher risk of poverty, with nearly one in ten children in poverty living in households with none of these characteristics. There will also be children living in families where these circumstances apply who do not experience poverty.

Figure 7 summarises the estimated proportion of children who live in poverty in these categories in Scotland. Equivalent data for Local Authorities is not available.

Figure 7: Proportion of children in priority groups who are in relative poverty in Scotland



Source: Poverty and Income Inequality Scotland National Statistics Report 2024

1 Estimates are based on data from the DWP Family Resources Survey and use three-year averages*

2 All figures are for the period 2020/23, with the exceptions of those reported for younger mothers (2015/18) and families with a baby under one (2017/20)

* Data collection was disrupted during the first year of the pandemic, and the year 2020/21 is excluded from the Scottish Government analysis

Limited data at the local level about the priority groups at risk of experiencing child poverty is routinely produced. Figure 8 summarises numbers who may be at risk from available data, but not all in the categories will be living in poverty.

Figure 8: Priority family groups in Argyll and Bute and Highland

Measure	Argyll and Bute	Highland	Scotland
Households with dependent children ¹	6,900	16,300	582,300
Families with children receiving support from Universal Credit ²	2,563	7,331	199,583
Lone Parent households ³	1,839	5,347	149,029
Large families ⁴	524	1,425	37,767
Households with dependant children where someone has a disability ⁵	708	2,134	58,103
Children under 1 ⁶	579	1,909	46,959
Mothers under 25 ⁶	64	284	6,624
Ethnic minorities population under 25 ⁷	773	2,521	171,509

¹ Source: Nomis official census and labour market statistics, Annual population survey 2022.

² Source: Stat-Xplore, Households with dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit, February 2024.

³ Source: Stat-Xplore, Lone parent households with dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit, February 2024.

⁴ Source: Stat-Xplore, Households with 3 or more dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit, February 2024.

⁵ Source: Stat-Xplore, Households with dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit with Disabled Child Entitlement and/or Limited Capability for Work Entitlement, February 2024.

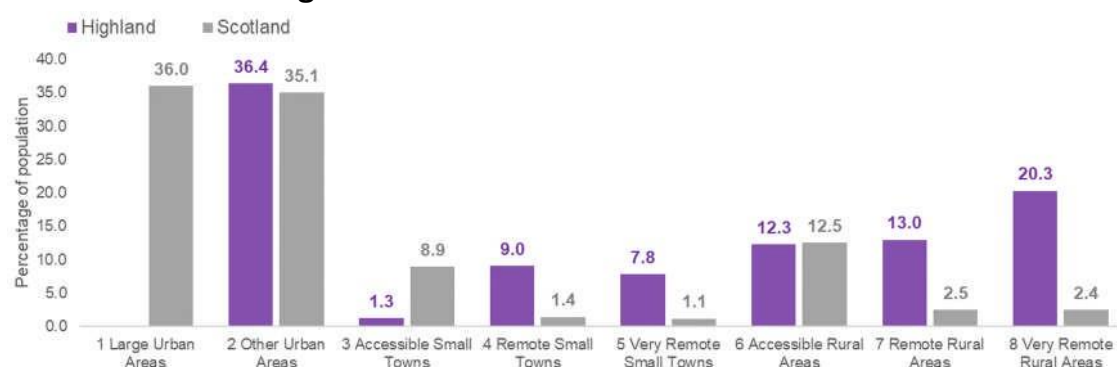
⁶ Source: National Records of Scotland, Births 2022.

⁷ Source: Ethnic group by age, Scotland's Census 2022. Ethnic minorities including: White: Gypsy/ Traveller, Mixed or multiple ethnic group, Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British: Total, African: Total, Caribbean or Black: Total, Other ethnic groups: Total.

3 Remote and Rural Factors

In Highland, one in three children and young people under 18 years reside in remote rural areas, with one in five living in very remote rural areas. In contrast, one in twenty children lives in remote rural areas in Scotland, with one in forty living in very remote rural areas.

Figure 9: Percentage of the population aged under 18 years of age living in urban and rural areas in Highland and Scotland in 2021



Source: Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020 and NRS Small Area Population Estimates for 2021

Remoteness from services and facilities is an important factor in relation to considering poverty and deprivation in Highland with access challenges compounding

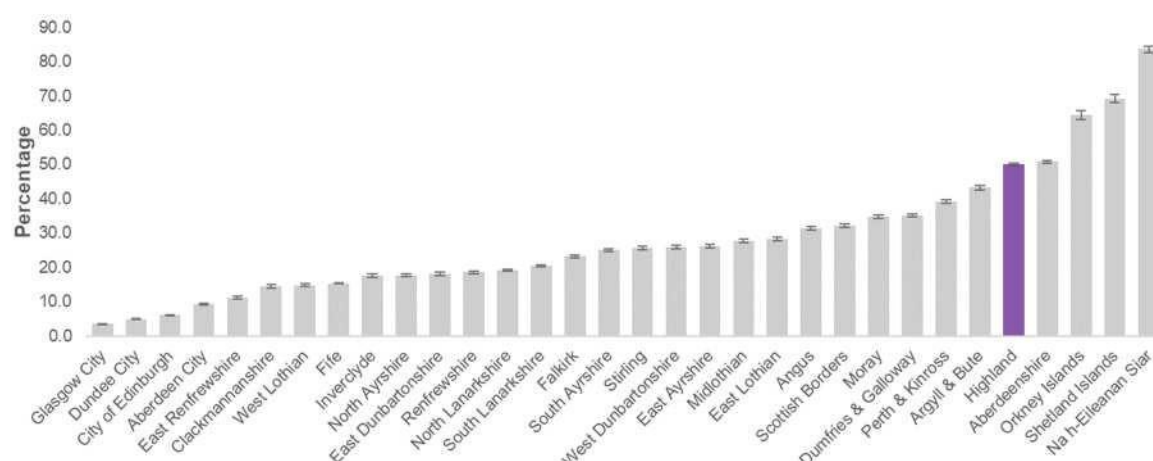
other disadvantages. In remote and rural areas, low incomes of people are exacerbated by additional costs. This includes more expensive food and clothing, more expensive household goods, increased home energy costs and the costs of transport as shown in work on the Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland.³ This highlights that for people living in rural areas of Scotland, a minimum acceptable standard of living typically requires between a tenth and a third more household spending than in urban parts of the UK.

Evidence from the literature highlights that people living in rural areas experience deprivation differently from those living in towns and cities. Particular issues in rural areas include:

- Less accessible key services including health and social care, childcare and high speed digital networks
- Higher consumption of fuel for heating and transport
- 33% of households in Highland experience fuel poverty (average for Scotland is 24%)⁴
- Reduced opportunities to earn adequate income
- Higher cost of living impacted by prices for basic essential supplies
- Limited frequency and coverage of public transport

50% of children and young people in Highland live in the most deprived access quartile according to SIMD. This is amongst the highest levels in Scotland.

Figure 10: Young people living in the most access deprived quintile, aged 00- 25 years in 2020



Source: ScotPHO Community Profiles – SIMD 2016, Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland

³ Minimum income standard for Remote Rural Scotland – Policy update 2016, Loughborough University <http://www.hie.co.uk/common/handlers/download-document.ashx?id=90d6c2f6-a461-4ff8-9902-49f073765e39>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-islands-data-overview-2023/pages/9/>

In 2022, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Rural College published *Improving our understanding of child poverty in rural and island Scotland*.⁵ It identified that interventions to tackle child poverty in rural and island locations should:

- recognise higher costs of living and of service delivery in these locations
 - ensure early intervention and a long-term approach
 - place children and families at the centre of the intervention
 - explore digital approaches as a delivery mechanism, where appropriate
 - involve schools as key partners
 - ensure all interventions are rural and island proofed.
-

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-understanding-child-poverty-rural-island-scotland/>