

Highland

Local Child Poverty Action Update Report 2020 - 21

August 2021

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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:

“To work together to reduce inequality within Highland communities”

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 2017-2027. The five core outcomes have been chosen and agreed upon with communities. The partnership believes working towards these outcomes will have a significant impact on reducing inequalities in Highland.

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 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 connect between all national and local strategic planning. Our child poverty plan connects partnership strategic planning within a single framework. This framework provides both the tools for planning, self-evaluation, reporting, performance management and assurance.

The use of shared improvement language and tools strengthens and aligns the partnership approach across Highland.

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 Service Plan uses an improvement model to determine outcomes, identify priorities and quality assure the plan.

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.

Section 1: Background and Context

Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

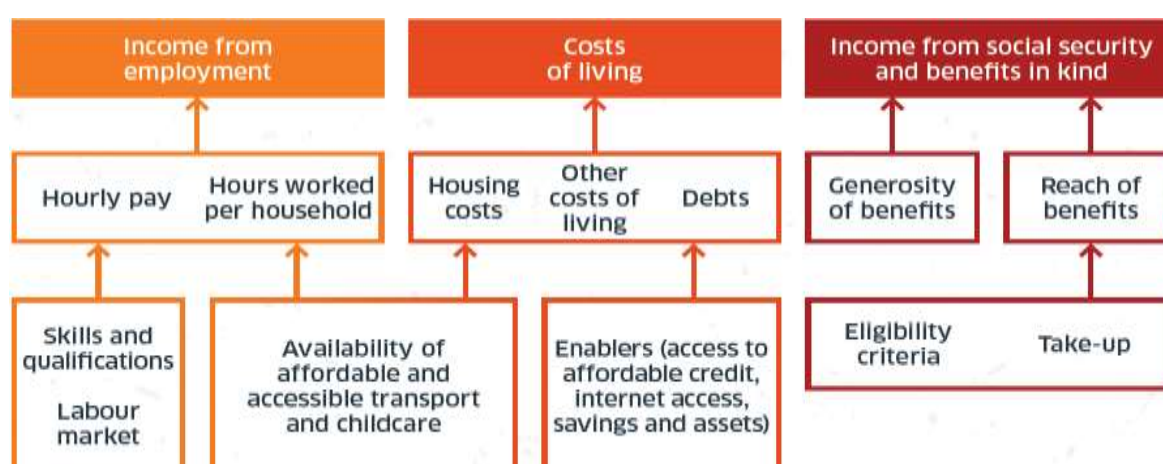
In 2017, the Scottish Government introduced the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act](#). This replaced the previous UK Child Poverty Act 2010 and included duties on both the Scottish Government and local partners to address child poverty. It also introduced income targets as a driver for reducing child poverty 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 first Delivery Plan – [Every Child, Every Chance](#) sets out policies and proposal 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



¹ A 2013 study found that child poverty in the UK was costing at least £29 billion a year – [http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Cost%20of%20child%20poverty%20research%20update%20\(2013\)_0.pdf](http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Cost%20of%20child%20poverty%20research%20update%20(2013)_0.pdf)

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.

Poverty in Highland – Impact of COVID-19

Impact of COVID-19 on employment

People in Highland are more likely to be economically active than across Scotland as a whole; 80% of people are economically active in Highland compared to 76.5% across Scotland (Oct 2019-Sep 2020). Within Highland though, there are particular economic challenges as a result of the predominantly rural area. Average incomes in Highland are lower than the Scottish average, largely influenced by the dominant tourism and catering industries which are traditionally lower paid. Average annual income in Highland is £30,436 compared to £30,940 nationally. Employees are also less likely to be in receipt of the living wage with 20.8% of employees earning less than the living wage in 2018. The seasonal and part time nature of employment are also contributing factors. In 2019, 38.9% of jobs in Highland were part time in nature, compared to 33.7% across Scotland.

While the full impact is not yet known, COVID-19 has undoubtedly impacted upon the Highland economy. Unemployment rose from 2.4% to 5.7% between July 2019 and July 2020. Youth unemployment rose even more significantly over this period from 3.9% to 9.9%. There are also higher rates of unemployment in more rural communities of Highland including Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross. In January 2021, just more than 20,000 people were claiming universal credit.

Whilst the impact on the economy is not yet fully understood it is likely that some businesses will not survive the impact of lockdown resulting in further job losses and emerging data projects higher and prolonged levels of unemployment.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has identified that, on the eve of the crisis, about 1 in 7 (15%) employees in the UK worked in a sector that has largely or entirely shut down during the Covid-19 lockdown.²

These sectors include non-food based retail, travel, personal care, domestic services and childcare. Sectors such as hospitality, tourism and self-employment have experienced particular challenges. These form a considerable element of the Highland economy.

Individuals aged under 25 are around 2.5 times more likely to work in one of these affected sectors and will include families with young children.

Since the beginning of March until August 2020 Children 1st Parentline, has reported a 158% increase of calls about finances and employment and the Scottish Welfare Fund saw an 88% increase in requests for assistance in April, compared with the same period last year. The main concerns raised by families include: loss of income,

² <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

need for benefit checks, grant application support, utility issues and payment holiday requests. Children 1st has also reported that many of these calls are from families who would not have previously sought their services including families who are in settled employment where furlough is impacting.

The National Job Retention Scheme or furloughing of staff, has provided a very necessary protection for many employees. However, this offered up to 80% of someone's salary based on contract hours which meant that many employees received a fraction of what their usual pay might have been which would have often been boosted prior to the Job Retention Scheme through overtime or additional hours worked. This will have resulted in a sharp reduction in income for many families and it remains to be seen what will happen to local employment opportunities and the economy as the Job Retention Scheme finally ends.

A survey commissioned by Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported in June 2020 that

*“almost a third of households (31%) across Scotland have reported a drop in incomes since March 2020. In the Highlands and Islands this rises to 44%”*³

The impact of all this is felt specifically by certain key groups including women and children as these are traditional sectors that women are more likely to be employed within and equally sectors that traditionally would be lower paid or part time employment

Educational Outcomes

Educational attainment is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. One of the drivers of future poverty is poor educational outcomes which can impact on future employment outcomes and earnings. Higher levels of educational qualifications are likely to mean families are better able to find employment and more secure and better paid work. Evidence shows that across Scotland the poverty related attainment gap widens as young people progress through school. This is also shown as young people leave school and enter positive leaver destinations (education, training or employment). While there has been an improvement in recent years, there remains a gap of 8.4%.

In May 2020, the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG) undertook research about the experiences of school closures for children and families. They found that 40% of low-income families were missing at least one essential resource to support their children's learning. One third of the families who were most worried about money had to buy a laptop, tablet or other device. Families that were most worried about money were also more likely to have bought educational resources for their children and were more likely to say they found it difficult to continue their children's education at home.⁴

³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, June 2020 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/almost-third-scots%E2%80%99-incomes-have-reduced-lockdown-half-affected-renters-worried-about-paying>

⁴ Child poverty Action Group (CPAG) *The cost of learning in lockdown: family experiences of school closures June 2020*

A recent survey of different community groups and organizations in Highland about the impact of COVID-19 on their services highlighted digital exclusion:

“Reliance on digital communications both to deliver services and provide information was reported to be inappropriate and ineffective in some cases. Several services commented that their service users had limited financial resources and did not have access to the necessary devices, Wi-Fi, data or credit. This is illustrated by one organisation’s comment: “we purchased a laptop for a group of 16-21 year olds, as without it, they could not continue to be involved with producing a local newsletter”.”

It will be important to ensure that any actions taken to address child poverty consider the impact on the local economy and the need to both protect jobs where possible or to grow and develop new industries and sectors as alternatives. This will equally demand a look at where there are current gaps in the job market and where training and support can be provided to support young people and families to maximise these opportunities and the creation of Fair Work which supports families.

Cost of living

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. 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.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020 highlights that 7% of Highland’s datazones fall within the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland. However, the SIMD as a measure of deprivation presents challenges within a rural setting, as rural areas tend to be less homogenous than urban areas in terms of levels of deprivation and the numbers involved tend to be smaller. Deprived households in rural areas are therefore unlikely to make a statistical impact on an area basis making rural disadvantage less visible. Data from the income and employment domains of the SIMD illustrates this, as 81.1% of income deprived and 81.3% of employment deprived people in Highland do not live in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland.⁵

While not all children living in deprived areas are living in poverty, there is a clear association between income and area poverty: more than a third of children in the most deprived SIMD quintile live in low-income households compared to fewer than one in 20 in the least deprived quintile.⁶

⁵ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/>

⁶ Giles and Richardson. *Children and Young People’s Profile: Scotland overview report*. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2017. www.scotpho.org.uk/media/1568/cyp-profile-overview-report-sept17.pdf

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
- Reduced opportunities to earn adequate income
- Higher cost of living impacted by prices for basic essential supplies
- Limited frequency and coverage of public transport

These factors can work as a compound, with the low incomes of people in remote rural areas being 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.⁷ 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.

While there are specific issues facing rural communities, household costs in general can be challenging for families and can result in many individuals already on low incomes struggling further. This could be costs associated with food and fuel but also costs to enable families access leisure or holiday activities and participate alongside with their friends. Costs associated with the school day – trips, uniforms, events, transport – have been highlighted as particular challenges and result in children and young people missing out on opportunities.

A further area of challenge for families are costs associated with childcare. Childcare is vital for many families to be able to increase incomes through seeking employment. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to increase choice and flexibility of hours of provision within their area, alongside the expansion of entitlement to 600 hours per year.

A substantial number of parents felt there is not enough flexibility in current ELC provision. This was particularly the case for local authority provision. Several participants suggested that half-day nursery sessions are insufficient to enable parents to work, and some felt that only a small proportion of local authority nurseries offer flexibility in terms of longer sessions or places outside term time. Parents on low incomes and living in the most deprived areas were more likely than others to prefer to use the 1140 funded hours with a local authority nursery, playgroup, family centre or childminder.

A little more than half (54%) of parents with children eligible for funded ELC indicated that they pay for at least some of the ELC they use for children aged under 6. The majority (69%) of those who pay for ELC for eligible children aged under 6 stated

⁷ *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>

they have experienced affordability problems in the last 12 months. This included 18% of those who pay for eligible children who have experienced significant affordability problems. When asked about the nature of affordability difficulties, nearly all of those with experience of affordability problems mentioned the high cost of childcare (97%). Parents have also experienced other difficulties such as paying childcare fees upfront (26%), costs of trips or other activities (9%), paying refundable deposits (7%), and having to pay other upfront costs such as registration fees (7%).

It is important that alongside maximising incomes through work or benefit entitlements, that families are supported to reduce costs by maximising grants, accessing concessionary schemes, accessing affordable childcare and discounts where they are available. There is also a role for professionals working with children to increase the awareness of not limiting access to activities as a result of costs.

Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty is a particular challenge for rural communities. Increased costs of fuel in rural areas, the lack of choice in heating sources and the condition and type of housing, all contribute to higher levels of fuel poverty within rural areas. The highest levels of fuel poverty experienced in Scotland, are all within predominantly rural and island authorities. In Highland, just under half of households are said to be living in fuel poverty, almost double the national average. 27% of households with children are said to be fuel poor, compared to 13% across Scotland as a whole.

All of this has been exacerbated by COVID-19 resulting in families spending more time at home and experiencing higher levels of heating and energy bills. Equally, providing food for children over the time spent at home and increases in food bills and accompanying costs in enabling digital access to work and school has taken a toll on families where the available income is already under strain.

Debt

A report from Save the Children and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sets out new research and modelling looking at the incomes of families on low incomes during the pandemic. There were 412 responses from families in Scotland which showed that almost half reported a reduction in income since March and that almost nine in ten reported rising household costs. More than half of families on Universal Credit or Child Tax Credits have been pushed to borrow money since the start of the crisis. Over half have fallen behind on rent or other household bills and 71% have had to cut back on food and other essentials.⁸

Some work undertaken by Fraser of Allander Institute estimated that only 42% of Scottish Households in the bottom income decile would have sufficient savings to cover 1 month of their regular income⁹. For many families, the lock down and loss of

⁸ *A Lifeline for our children: strengthening the social security system for families with children during this pandemic*, Save the children and Joseph Rowntree foundation, June 2020

⁹ <https://fraserofallander.org/covid/the-coronavirus-and-household-incomes-liquidity-constrained-households-in-scotland/>

income meant that they had to rely on income from elsewhere to supplement household expenditure. Many of these families would have been households that had been “getting by” prior to this and with no prior knowledge or use of benefit entitlements. A new application to Universal Credit can take up to 5 weeks to process resulting in households having to borrow money in the period while they waited. We can see the resulting increase in use of food banks and food parcels as a proxy measure of what was happening during this time for many households.

Food Insecurity

COVID-19 has undoubtedly changed the landscape with regards to food insecurity. Food insecurity has been an ongoing challenge for many families. 4% of adults in Scotland were estimated to have experienced food insecurity from the start of the COVID crisis to 9th April. In the 5 weeks following lockdown, 20% of Scottish households with children were estimated to have experienced food insecurity ¹⁰. The use of foodbanks has steadily increased in recent years, with the Inverness Foodbank reporting a 20% increase in clients in November 2019 over the previous 12 months.

Food insecurity has increased alongside the increase in unemployment, further lockdowns and the reliance on the furlough scheme which for many means a 20% reduction in income. There is an expectation that demand will gradually increase and a consensus that long term planning is necessary to ensure sufficient resources to meet demand.

Based on low income, around 4,700 P1-S6 pupils are receiving alternative free school meals using vouchers which are redeemed locally for cash. This cash-first approach provides spending choices for families and supports the local economy. Funded by the Scottish Government, the Council paid a £100 winter hardship payment to every pupil receiving free school meal vouchers and will be making a further £100 hardship payment for Easter 2021. Ongoing food support provision for pupils, including during the summer months, is under consideration.

The Highland landscape surrounding food provision is complex. A number of organisations currently provide emergency food parcels or supplies and hot meals. Referral or eligibility criteria vary widely. Some organisations actively seek solutions and provide support to address the underlying causes of food poverty to avoid creating a dependency on the service. Other organisations are focused on addressing the immediate needs of people they believe are “*slipping through the welfare net*”.

There are a number of food –based initiatives that individuals described when asked about what was working well including MOO Food in Muir of Ord and the FareShare scheme.

Over the period, the Council has distributed – directly or through groups – almost 374 tonnes of food. The Covid-19 response has seen a series of food initiatives

¹⁰ “*Food Insecurity evidence through a Covid-19 lens: evidence snapshot*” unpublished working paper to inform PHS food insecurity group

developed including food tables and food fridges which incorporate choice and self-preparation and are felt to be less stigmatising. In February 2021, groups report continuing to provide food support within communities with no sign of the demand for this decreasing.

Food initiatives that incorporate choice and self-preparation were preferable than foodbank models as they were felt to be less stigmatising, there was, however concern raised by individuals about the sustainability of some of the projects responding to food insecurity

Impact of COVID-19 on income from social security and benefits

A key route out of poverty is to increase incomes and ensure that all families receive the benefits that they are entitled to. There are about 1.8 million households of working age who receive at least 80% of their income from benefits. However, it should be noted the welfare system supports a substantially greater number of households, for example:

- many more households get smaller income top-ups from the benefits system;
- about half of all working-age households currently receive some benefits. Even excluding child benefit - which all but the highest-income households are entitled to receive - the figure is about one in three.

With an increase in the number of people on reduced incomes as a result of coronavirus, it is important to ensure that families are aware of all possible entitlements in order to maximise incomes and reduce poverty.

The lockdown has resulted in an increase in unemployment and claims for Universal Credit. The latest figures show that applications to Universal Credit in May 2020 remain double the average claims in 2019 in Highland.

The Highland Council Welfare Support team and local CABx reported significant increases in enquiries for finance and money advice; welfare benefits and school meal vouchers; employment issues, advice on the support available; existing debt concerns; rent arrears and advice on decisions already made relating to claims for Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

It is important that the local Welfare support Team and Citizens Advice are able to respond to the need of families looking for advice and support to ensure that they are signposted to all the relevant help they are entitled to and equally that opportunities for people to be referred onto these support and advice agencies are embedded in services such as health and education.

Working-age benefits are not simply supporting an unchanging group. The majority of households will require support at some point for a variety of reasons including during periods of low income, parenthood or ill health.

Equally, as the economy is further impacted and further job losses result then Highland Council will need to prepare for more children becoming eligible for priority

2 places in childcare and higher numbers becoming eligible for clothing grants, free school meals and other supports targeted at children.

Protected Characteristics

Deprivation works in combinations of factors, the barriers and opportunities available to families will differ by local area. They will also differ by protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act) and there are certain groups where the evidence shows us that prevalence of child poverty is higher¹¹ and therefore are also at higher risk from the economic impact of the current crisis.

It is important to understand the specific barriers faced by each of these groups so that the response is also targeted to their needs. These groups include:

- Women / Mothers
- Lone Parents
- BAME families, including gypsy travellers
- Families with a disabled member
- Large families
- Families with a child under 1
- Mother under 25
- Families in homelessness accommodation
- Young carers
- Asylum seekers /those with no recourse to public funds
- Looked after young people (up to age of 26)
- Parents who are key workers
- Low income families living in poorer quality housing (at risk of fuel poverty)

Risk Factors for Adverse Childhood Experiences

The risk factors associated with increased likelihood of experiencing abuse, trauma and stress in childhood are extremely varied. A report by the UCL Institute of Health Equity summarised a number of interacting risk factors for adverse childhood experiences including poverty, low socioeconomic status and the impact of disadvantage. It has been reported that these risk factors are often co-occurring and interlinked, and that it is usually the cumulative effects of a combination of factors, rather than a single issue that leads to a child's experience of adversity and stress. Actions identified therefore need to recognise the importance of different approaches and the connections between these different risk factors.¹²

¹¹Scottish Government, *Child Poverty Development Plan*, [Equality Impact Assessment](#)

¹²*The impact of adverse experiences in the home on the health of children and young people, and inequalities in prevalence and effect.* UCL Institute of Health Equity

Section 2: Action in Highland

What have we done to address Child Poverty in 2020/21

The following summarises the key actions identified in the partnership’s 2019 Child Poverty Action Report against each of the core themes. Progress against each of these actions, alongside actions to address the covid specific circumstances are detailed.

Theme: Income from Employment	
Area for Action	Progress
<p>Addressing the poverty related attainment gap A series of actions are planned to address the poverty related attainment gap. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of a new educational improvement approach with the aim of improving educational outcomes for children. 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 on understanding the poverty related attainment gap • A review of spend and outcomes in order to understand the impacts of the Pupil Equity Funding 	<p>The actions intended to be taken to address the poverty related attainment gap were put on hold as a result of the pandemic and the focus changed to ensuring children had access to appropriate learning and support during the lockdown periods. Supports put in place included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing vulnerable children hubs ensuring children, young people and their families had weekly contact with schools. • At the height of the pandemic, Highland’s health visitors, in partnership with Highland Council Welfare Team and NHS Public Health team worked to address inequalities and child poverty through a Financial Inclusion Project. This project supported young families in need to get the financial support at the time they needed it most. The rapid “test of change” cycles enabled close scrutiny and prompt support for families yielding a total of £13, 681 support for 150 families across the initial 6 month period. The project was recognised through the national CYPIC awards and has continued to scale and spread across Highland
<p>Living Wage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS Highland and the Council are Living Wage employers. Since April 2015 the Council has applied the Local Government Scottish Living Wage rate to all Highland Council employees including apprentices. The real Living Wage is an hourly rate which is set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland Council has achieved Living Wage accredited status from the Living Wage Foundation and Poverty Alliance. Whilst the Council was already a Living Wage employer since 2015, accreditation also covers an ongoing commitment to encouraging contractors to pay their workers the real living

<p>independently by the Living Wage Foundation, on an annual basis and calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the challenges in Highland regarding low wages compounded by seasonal employment and the higher costs of food, fuel, housing and transport, payment of the real living wage can have a positive impact. The Council is working towards becoming an Accredited Living Wage employer. This involves making a commitment to pay all directly employed staff the real living wage rate and to ensure that all contracted staff who work regularly on the Council premises are paid the living wage and undertake to encourage contractors to pay the real Living Wage through our procurement processes. 	<p>wage too.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In January 2021, the Council agreed to work towards achieving Living Wage designation status for the Highland Council Area to provide benefit and support for lower paid employees but also for business in relation to recruitment and retention of staff. Work will take place to engage with other areas who have taken forward this approach and to engage with major employers to determine the level of commitment to this and how businesses can be supported to progressing this in Highland. NHS Highland are working towards Living Wage Accreditation during 2021/22
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Theme: Costs of Living	
Area for Action	Progress
<p>Implementation of early learning and childcare 1140 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a review of early years' services to support the programme to ensure that every 2, 3 and 4 year old in Highland can access their entitlement of 1140 hours of funded childcare August 2020 ensuring that the principles of quality, flexibility, affordability and accessibility are met, the Council with partners will deliver a more efficient and effective service, including specialist support, and ensure that savings can be generated as a result a further action will consider flexible models of childcare, particularly for rural areas 	<p>Implementation of 1140 hours during 2020/21 was disrupted due to the pandemic. During 2020/21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interim arrangements were developed to enable parents to access 1140 hours where capital works were delayed due to covid including families able to access 1140 over two locations and temporary on and off-site additional spaces being used. By during the first lockdown free universal early learning and childcare was provided for keyworker and vulnerable families. During lockdown two, most ELC providers remained open providing childcare for keyworker and vulnerable children, with local arrangements made for those who April 2021, 90% of settings were delivering 1140 hours provision
Cost of the school day	The planned programme related to the costs of the school day was refocused in light

- Support schools to better understand the implications of the cost of the school day. This will support schools to better understand the challenges and impact upon families and consider this within school life.

of the pandemic. This specifically focused on ensuring that families received the entitlements that were available and that children and young people were not disadvantaged due to being at home during the pandemic. Further related details can also be found under the sections on the Poverty Related Attainment Gap and Income and Benefits from Social Security.

School based supports during covid

Extensive use was made of social media to promote educational entitlements, which was complemented by messaging direct to parents from their local school. Educational entitlement checks were routinely undertaken for all residents, with school-age children, who access pan-Highland welfare support services.

School Clothing Grants: The School Clothing Grant is £140 for eligible Primary School and Secondary School children payable to low-income households in receipt of specified benefits. This is above Scottish Government's national rate of £120.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA): EMA is a weekly allowance of £30 per week, payable during term time, which supports 16-19 year-olds from low-income families, to continue their education in a school or college.

Free School Meals and Holiday Payments: All P1-S6 pupils in receipt of means-tested Free School Meals received a £25 Wellbeing Payment which was from the Council. There are around 4,500 Highland children and young people who are entitled to free school meals based on low income (caseloads fluctuate according to needs).

Digital Inclusion

- The Council worked with the Scottish Government funded "[No-one-left-](#)

	<p>behind", Connecting Scotland programme to provide equipment and improve digital for people who were digitally excluded, on low incomes with no access to a device or at risk of isolation due to their clinical vulnerability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During phase one the Council were assigned 330 devices which were allocated to 28 voluntary organisations for distribution. • The second phased focused on digitally excluded families with children and care experienced young people. The Council were assigned a total of 618 devices which were again allocated in partnership with local voluntary organisations • In addition, under the Connection Scotland Education Programme, the Council were awarded £1.3m to address digital inclusion for disadvantaged children and young people. The Council already had a pre-pandemic programme of chromebooks for all P6/7 and secondary aged pupils which had assisted in addressing digital exclusion. This additional funding enabled further expansion of the Chromebook estate, investment in an improved management of the Chromebook service and platform and expand the connectivity with the MIFI devices 2. • A referral process through Headteachers was in place from March 2020, to address any concerns regarding digital access. In the first three months, over a 100 devices to families, helping around 150 pupils throughout the Highlands who have no internet or those that are really struggling with data. The focus has been on those families who are vulnerable and lower income families.
<p><i>Food insecurity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring holiday provision linked to childcare and food – a pilot programme, Milton Holiday Hub, will operate over the summer of 2019, with the aim of providing food to children who are likely to be experiencing food insecurity. The Hub will provide hot meals, childcare and activities for to up to 24 children per day between the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Milton Holiday Hub was a pilot holiday programme funded by Scottish Government. The Council's strong collaboration with partners ensured that the Hub programme was delivered on time and within budget. ➤ Milton was identified as a rural area for the pilot as it experiences a range of challenges, including deprivation, a lack of services generally which are more acute during holiday periods and is geographically isolated.

ages of 3 and 12 years old.

- Implementation of Food+ project which aims to support local communities to provide food plus an activity that a family can engage.

- The Highland Council committed staff resources to lead and organise the hub in collaboration with local partners between the Highland Council, Milton Primary School, The Mercat Centre (Milton's Community Centre), High Life Highland (HLH) and Action for Children (AFH).
- Hubs were delivered for 2 weeks in Summer 2019 and October 2019.
- The pilot had several aims to support families who may find it difficult when free school meals are not available to meet the additional costs of school holidays:
 - to provide a free, hot cooked meal to children using the school kitchen during holiday periods
 - to provide free, fully registered childcare for up to 24 children per day during holiday periods
 - to provide free activities to children attending childcare and other children in the community during the holiday periods
- Planning was progressed for Easter 2020, however Covid prevented this from taking place. Although planning had begun, it was not possible to provide hub activities during Summer/October or Christmas 2020 due to the restrictions arising from the pandemic.

Food and Fuel Support for Vulnerable and Self-Isolation Individuals

Support for vulnerable and self-isolating people in Highland was co-ordinated throughout the pandemic and extended to people experiencing food and fuel insecurity as well as those required to shield or self-isolate through the Test and Protect programme. Public sector bodies worked alongside the huge community effort spontaneously organised.

This approach has helped to develop important learning about the breadth and depth of poverty in Highland Communities, often more hidden in rural areas, and understanding the disproportionate impact of Covid on different groups in the community are shaping our approach to place-based interventions, and joint working

	<p>across services for poverty reduction and tackling inequalities.</p> <p>The activities undertaken by varied teams – often working together for the first time included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting up of the new helpline and separate Shielding helpline, handling 5800 calls from March to June 2020, with staff not only handling calls received but also proactively calling over 5000 people on the shielding list to check in on them, to see what support they needed and often being the only personal contact that some people had in several weeks; • setting up a virtual hub to coordinate requests received for support from call handlers (food, pharmacy, sanitary products, fuel/power cards and social/wellbeing support), directing these to local community hub teams of staff and volunteers and reporting weekly to the Scottish Government. • establishing 10 local community hubs staffed by Council and HLH staff to distribute food, supplies, pharmacy products and provide wellbeing/social support for those shielding, self-isolating and those experiencing financial hardship. Role also to liaise and work with community resilience groups to direct requests and support in the supply of food to these groups. • joint working with the welfare team to deal with benefit referrals and work with food suppliers and food banks and with SW family teams where support is needed; • establishing referral protocols between Highland schools and Adult Health and Social Care teams to ensure vulnerable families/individuals were supported with supplies; • call handling from people required to self-isolate through the Test and Protect Team to see what support they required and proactively calling everyone notified by the public health team required to self-isolate – 6,609 outbound calls made since November 2020;
<i>Rapid rehousing</i>	<u>Recruitment of Rapid Rehousing Team</u>

- Implementation of a 5 year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) with a focus on measures to make significant changes to our approach to homelessness and Temporary Homeless Accommodation in line with the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group.
- Key themes of the Plan include: development and implementation of a Housing First approach; transformation of Temporary Homeless Accommodation to reduce use of Private Rented Sector HMO accommodation; development of a closer working relationship with the Private Rented Sector and a review of The Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy.

- A rapid re-housing team was recruited in August 2020 with caseload responsibility and interaction with service users for the most complex homeless and long duration cases Highland wide out with the Housing First caseload.
- During 2020/21 the posts focused on:
 - the redesign of referral and exit pathways in respect of contracted supported accommodation and
 - complex cases outwith supported accommodation developing action plans to identify and address barriers to a permanent housing outcome.

Shared Temporary Accommodation

- The Council has trialled an approach which enables 2 people to share a Council house or flat as temporary homeless accommodation who would otherwise have been accommodated in House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) temporary accommodation.
- HMO temporary accommodation is recognised as a contributing factor to poverty and can also prevent positive engagement between homeless service users and key support agencies such as NHS due to the congregate living environment in HMO.
- The new shared TA model is seen an emerging best practice model being led by HC nationally. The model has proved effective and has been popular with service users in terms of affordability, quality of accommodation and peer support which both sharers can potentially benefit from.
- There are 24 Shared temporary tenancies in Highland as of 4 May 2021. As a result of the work of the TFA Share Team and the scaling up of our Shared TFA stock we are seeing a much reduced use in Highland of HMO type temporary accommodation.

Empty Homes / Private Rented Sector Officer

- The partnership work with Crisis to engage with the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Highland has continued to build a closer working relationship and

	<p>develop referral and support Pathways with the PRS. This work took forward the positive feedback received from the PRS in respect of a consultation on homelessness carried out in 2019. Commencement of this work was delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p><u>Housing First</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In February 2020, Housing First Highland accepted its first referral into its multidisciplinary Housing First team and now has 10 clients receiving intensive wrap-around support. • The HF Operational team comprises of 3 workers; Snr Nurse Practitioner NHS Highland Drug & Alcohol Recovery Service; Specialist Support Worker Salvation Army; Housing Options Officer Highland Council. • The project is focused on the Inner Moray Firth part of Highland, the central part of our authority area covering Inverness, Nairn, Dingwall and Invergordon and the towns and villages in between. • During 2020/21 there have been 12 HF clients through the caseload of the project, all of which have been amongst the most complex and challenging cases we have and all have been at extremely high risk of drug related harm or death. To date all tenancies have been sustained with very positive multiagency engagement from HF clients.
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Theme: Income from social security and benefits in kind	
Area for Action	Progress
<p><i>Embedding referral pathways</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • embedding financial referral pathways into school practices. A referral pathway toolkit is intended to be produced as part of a suite of resources for teachers and school staff alongside Cost of the School Day and poverty awareness training. 	<p><i>Embedding Referral Pathways</i></p> <p>Work has progressed to developing and embedding referral pathways to support improved access to welfare support services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • embedded resources from NHS Health Scotland (Asking About Money Worries) within the health visitor and midwives Health Information Trail

- THC and NHSH continuing to work together to engage with individuals through a range health settings. Monthly, fortnightly or weekly patient welfare and money sessions are beginning in 6 GP practices across Highland with a view to evaluating before developing further.
- developing links with community mental health teams with a view to ensuring those accessing their services are signposted
- recognising that in-work poverty may affect staff in any organisation. A pilot awareness session is planned in a large NHSH setting to identify if staff and patients are likely to engage within this setting. The partnership includes NHS Highland, The Highland Council, Citizens Advice Bureau and Home Energy Scotland. The findings from the pilot will be reviewed before further developing the work

- Hosted Highland Councils Welfare Support Team within 6 GP practices across Highland and an evaluation completed.
- Developed links with community mental health teams
- Delivered a drop-in aimed at staff working within Raigmore including representation from Highland councils Welfare Support Team; Citizens Advice Bureau and Home Energy Scotland.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, welfare services had developed blended accessible provision, using a variety of channels, in order to meet the diverse needs of residents. These included community hubs, co-location of services, partnerships, outreach, mobile services (e.g. home visits), online and telephone services. Such agile delivery models ensured these welfare services were very well equipped to adapt quickly and effectively to seamlessly implement new ways of operating for advisers and volunteers, while ensuring equality of access to such vital support throughout the whole of 2020/21. Digital service delivery has been essential in order to continue to provide effective and proportionate responses to the changing and increasingly complex needs of the client base throughout the pandemic.

Roll out of Best Start Grants

- Embedded all resources and leaflets ref Healthy Start as part of the Highland Information Trail to support health professionals to have meaningful conversations.

Financial Support Through Covid

Funded by the Scottish Government, the Revenues & Business Support section implemented at pace and successfully administered several financial support schemes during 2020/21 to help improve financial securities and equalities. These included free school meal vouchers, hardship payments, and a much-valued locally designed fuel support scheme. Taken together with the welfare payments that were already being administered by the Revenues & Business Support section prior to the pandemic, e.g.

Housing Benefit, Scottish Welfare Fund, and Council Tax Reduction, the amount paid by the Council to vulnerable and marginalised Highland residents during 2020/21 was in the region of £60.6m. As the Department for Work and Pensions administer Universal Credit, and Social Security Scotland are rolling out devolved benefits, this figure excludes the total amount of Universal Credit and social security awarded to Highland residents.

The Council worked collaboratively with NHS Highland Public Health, Independent Food Aid Network and the Trussell Trust to produce The Worrying About Money? guide, which is published on the Council's website in English, Arabic and Polish. Copies of the guide are available at:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/1934/worrying_about_money_advice

- In addition, a Money Matters course has also been developed to support charities and third sector organisations to be able to discuss the leaflet and refer vulnerable households for help and support:
 - ✓ Tier One training is designed for volunteers and front-line staff in community organisations who are likely to have an opportunity to have a brief discussion about money and can signpost to support organisations using the “Worrying about Money?” leaflet. This 45-minute session focuses on Facts and figures on poverty, Key phrases to use to ask about money issues and Signposting to support service – “Worrying about Money?” leaflet.
 - ✓ Tier Two training is suitable for frontline staff in any organisation who have a supporting role and are likely to be able to build up relationships which can be used to ask about money. This 1.5hour session explores the Impact of Poverty, Skills development and practice around asking about money worries, Signposting and supporting to access the right services – “Worrying about Money?” leaflet and, Information on relevant support services.

- ✓ Tier Three training is targeted at Managers or Supervisors who can support staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of poverty. During the 45-minute session, attendees explore the Impact of poverty, Poverty sensitive practice and use of language, Links to Health Scotland VLE Poverty Hub, and Signposting to support service – “Worrying about Money?” leaflet. This is being piloted in two external organisations, and work is on-going to develop this module.

The Council in partnership with NHS Highland, produced a YouTube video to promote the Welfare Support Team and the support they are able to provide for households.

This video is available at the following link and is used regularly to raise awareness about the assistance available for Highland residents:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/102970/benefit_advice

Section 3: What are we planning to do to address Child Poverty in 2021/22

Many of the actions identified in the previous action plan will continue to be supported and developed, however, Covid-19 has had, and will continue to have, a major impact on families and children and levels of poverty and hardship experienced by families have increased.

For many families that were getting by before Covid-19, new challenges are now presented and in the light of all this we are currently reviewing and reprioritising the various actions required.

The partnership has developed a new Integrated Children's Services Plan and this includes a specific theme on child poverty. The development of the plan took into account the impact of the pandemic on communities including children, young people and families and the associated needs assessment work, informed the development of the plan. This has included a recent review of the various Recovery Plans from the represented partnerships involved in Community Planning.

The partnership actions to address child poverty in 2021/22 are therefore aligned to the Integrated Children's Plan and will be reported as part of the Integrated Children's Service Plan monitoring.

Theme: Income from Employment

Improvement priority:

Work to reduce the Poverty Related Attainment Gap in Highland

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

Educational attainment is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and evidence shows that across Scotland the poverty related attainment gap widens as young people progress through school. This is also demonstrated in those young people leaving school and entering a positive leaver destination – education, training or employment. Whilst this has reduced in recent years, there remains a gap of 8.4%.

Recent studies that have highlighted COVID-19's disproportionate impact on single-parent and low-income households as well as the negative impact on the educational outcomes for children and young people living in deprived areas. This has been driven by the digital divide and lack of access to educational resources.

A strong focus on reducing the poverty related attainment gap is therefore even more important at this current time.

Actions	Measures / evaluation	Times cale	Lead
Support schools and communities to use Pupil Equity Fund to build a sustainable and relevant skills-based pathway for learners, pre-birth- 18	Stakeholder feedback, triangulation of evidence, schools, families, partners Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment	April 2022	Learning, Leadership and Empowerment Team
Evidence how communities identified through Scottish attainment challenge can be supported to enable greater engagement with learning and community opportunities	Stakeholder feedback, triangulation of evidence, schools, families, partners Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment	April 2022	Learning, Leadership and Empowerment Team
Engage with partners at Northern Alliance to increase data narrative around, among other factors, digital divide and lack of access to educational resources	Self-evaluation evidence shows increase in engagement with and understanding of the impact on educational and social outcomes Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment	April 2021	Learning, Leadership and Empowerment Team

Theme: Income from Employment			
Improvement priority:			
Work to reduce the Poverty Related Attainment Gap in Highland			
Actions	Measures / evaluation	Times cale	Lead
<p>Attainment Scotland Fund - Schools Programme- Funded LA strategic plan to support 9 Highland schools with highest levels of deprivation in areas of Literacy; Numeracy and HWB. Literacy Development Officer working across 9 schools , this session actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Moderation and Assessment • Embed PM Benchmarking • Promote and train in use of Fresh Start with P6 upwards • Continue training in Talk for Writing • Complete Listening and Talking training material and resources • Roll out Listening and talking approaches in schools • Support Wrap Around Spelling in Primary schools <p>Speech and Language part time post to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support change in Teacher and pupil support assistant pedagogy/practice around adult – child interaction (words up Early/Primary) in all classroom environments in one pilot primary school <p>Numeracy Development Officer working across schools. This session actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to extend training to develop a consistent developmental approach to teaching numeracy. • Use and moderation of assessment of numeracy attainment data across almost all clusters: <p>CEYP Mentoring programme- planning for implementation in session 21/22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Partnership working with CEYP team in Health & Social Care plan to implementation of a pilot mentoring programme with all Care Experienced and disadvantaged groups in 3 ASGs in Highland. 	<p>Literacy Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Impact questionnaires – degree of pedagogy development and delivery impact. • Baseline assessment data Attainment data 17/18, 18/19. 19/20, 20/21 including PM Benchmark, SNSA • P7 – S1 Book banding data 18/19, 19/20, 20/21 • Cluster planning format for Reading, Writing, Listening and Talking. <p>SLT Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence rating scales with practitioners – before and after interventions. <p>Numeracy Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attainment data 17/18, 18/19. 19/20, 20/21 including Diagnostic assessments, SNSA • Staff Impact questionnaires – degree of pedagogy development and delivery impact. • Observation of pupil thinking and teacher knowledge and understanding as part of lesson study approach. <p>Mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established partnership agreement and contract of delivery • LA and School Planning in place • Recruitment of staff • Programme of planned activity 	<p>Aug '20 - June '21</p>	<p>Quality Improvement Manager</p>

<p>Effective Use of Data as a Lever to attain Educational Equity <i>Series of improved toolkits including planning tools; reflective analysis , data dashboards and support training . Actions include:</i></p> <p>Improving Approaches to PEF planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and issue improved PEF plan with more data focus and measurement mapping around interventions. • Provide a series of HT PEF clinics to support approaches to PEF planning and use of Data to inform and measure. • Temporary PEF central officers to support schools in PEF planning and approve spend linked to robust planning and measurement. <p>Improving Data Literacy at all Levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Primary HT refresh data training sessions • Develop and roll out a series of 5 Effective use of Data training modules for Primary classroom practitioners. • Update the Primary class attainment template to allow for more accountable target setting and tracking focus. • Arrange SNSA training provision to promote best use of diagnostic analysis to inform planning to need needs and address gaps in learning • Create a Secondary learner Journey dashboard to promote improved approaches to DYW / curriculum planning. • Support improved use of learner journey dashboard and Insight dataset analysis through SMT and Guidance staff training sessions. 	<p>Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion & issue of templates • Attendance and feedback from training • Improved PEF school planning – feedback from officers / schools • Launch of Learner Journey dashboard and feedback on school use. • HT observation school impact feedback linked to class teacher data training • Staff confidence impact scaling linked to training 	<p>Aug '20 - June '21</p>	<p>Quality Improvement Manager</p> <p>Quality Improvement Manager</p>
<p>Developing the Young Workforce – Equity of Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness event planning for guidance school staff in partnership with job centre and SDS to provide information for key staff on employment and skills opportunities in recovery. • As part of Young Person’s Guarantee, linked to school provision and pathways - recruitment, induction and joint planning to embed DYW coordinator role into schools. This role will play a vital part in bridging employer partnership and school planning which will involve targeting specific vulnerable groups and supporting pathways. • Working with the DYW regional groups, SDS , schools and colleges - arrange a ‘Promoting Pathways’ Events week - summer term – targeted groups linked to learner pathways. 	<p>Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DYW coordinators recruitment, induction and post commenced in schools by Easter '21 • Attendance and feedback from staff training events • Attendance and feedback from summer pathways events. • Positive destination data 	<p>Oct' 20 – June '21</p>	<p>Quality Improvement Manager</p>

Theme: Income from Employment**Improvement priority:**

Improve opportunities for training and apprenticeships for parents and young people as part of the Council's Economic Prosperity Fund

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

People in Highland are more likely to be economically active than across Scotland as a whole; 80% of people are economically active in Highland compared to 76.5% across Scotland (Oct 2019-Sep 2020). Within Highland though, there are particular economic challenges as a result of the predominantly rural area. Average incomes in Highland are lower than the Scottish average, largely influenced by the dominant tourism and catering industries which are traditionally lower paid. Average annual income in Highland is £30,436 compared to £30,940 nationally. Employees are also less likely to be in receipt of the living wage with 20.8% of employees earning less than the living wage in 2018. The seasonal and part time nature of employment are also contributing factors. In 2019, 38.9% of jobs in Highland were part time in nature, compared to 33.7% across Scotland.

Whilst the full impact is not yet known, Covid-19 has undoubtedly impacted upon the Highland economy. Unemployment rose from 2.4% to 5.7% between July 2019 and July 2020. Youth unemployment rose even more significantly over this period from 3.9% to 9.9%. There are also higher rates of unemployment in more rural communities of Highland including Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross. In January 2021, just more than 20,000 people were claiming universal credit.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has identified that, on the eve of the crisis, about 1 in 7 (15%) employees in the UK worked in a sector that has largely or entirely shut down during the Covid-19 lockdown. These sectors include non-food based retail, travel, personal care, domestic services and childcare. Sectors such as hospitality, tourism and self-employment have experienced particular challenges. These form a considerable element of the Highland economy.

Individuals aged under 25 are around 2.5 times more likely to work in one of these affected sectors and will include families with young children.

Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Support the roll out of Parental Employability Support Fund programme – targeting 'in work' progression for parents		Aug 2022	Economic Prosperity Fund
Support the development of the Young Person Guarantee work placement programme as a way to support job creation	Number of placements supported	Dec 2022	Economic Prosperity Fund
Develop the Modern Apprenticeship scheme for 16-65 year olds at all levels to support all sectors in Highland, including upskilling and vocational qualifications post Covid-19	Number of Modern Apprenticeships created	Dec 2022	Economic Prosperity Fund

Theme: Costs of Living**Improvement priority:**

Address food insecurity by increasing equity of access to good quality food

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

Food insecurity has been an ongoing challenge for many families. The use of foodbanks has steadily increased in recent years, with the Inverness Foodbank reporting a 20% increase in clients in November 2019 over the previous 12 months.

Based on low income, around 4,700 P1-S6 pupils are receiving alternative free school meals using vouchers which are redeemed locally for cash. This cash-first approach provides spending choices for families and supports the local economy. Funded by the Scottish Government, the Council paid a £100 winter hardship payment to every pupil receiving free school meal vouchers and will be making a further £100 hardship payment for Easter 2021. Ongoing food support provision for pupils, including during the summer months, is under consideration.

Covid-19 has undoubtedly changed the landscape with regards food insecurity. 4% of adults in Scotland were estimated to have experienced food insecurity from the start of the COVID crisis to 9th April. In the 5 weeks following lockdown, 20% of Scottish households with children were estimated to have experienced food insecurity. Food insecurity has increased alongside the increase in unemployment, further lockdowns and the reliance on the furlough scheme which for many means a 20% reduction in income.

Since the start of lockdown in March 2020, a range of existing and new community organisations have provided emergency food parcels or supplies and hot meals. Over the period, the Council has distributed – directly or through groups – almost 374 tonnes of food. Covid has seen a series of food initiatives have developed including food tables and food fridges which incorporate choice and self-preparation and are felt to be less stigmatising. In February 2021, groups report continuing to provide food support within communities with no sign of the demand for this decreasing.

Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Lobby the Scottish Government to continue the provision of the financial support for families during the school holidays	Feedback from the Scottish Government	April 2022	Poverty Reduction Delivery Group
Support the development of sustainable food tables and fridges in order to reduce the stigma associated with accessing food support	Number of food tables and fridges available	April 2023	Head of Community Support and Engagement
Develop strategies to increase the uptake of free-school meals	Increase in uptake of free school meal provision	August 2022	Head of Revenues and Business Support

Theme: Costs of Living

Improvement priority:

Reduce the financial barriers on families

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

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. 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.

Fuel poverty is a particular challenge for rural communities. Increased costs of fuel in rural areas, the lack of choice in heating sources and the condition and type of housing, all contribute to higher levels of fuel poverty within rural areas. The highest levels of fuel poverty experienced in Scotland, are all within predominantly rural and island authorities. In Highland, just under half of households are said to be living in fuel poverty, almost double the national average. 27% of households with children are said to be fuel poor, compared to 13% across Scotland as a whole.

Whilst there are specific issues facing rural communities, household costs in general result can be challenging for families and can result in many individuals already on low incomes struggling further. This could be costs associated with food and fuel but also costs to enable families access leisure or holiday activities and participate alongside with their friends. Costs associated with the school day – trips, uniforms, events, transport – have been highlighted as particular challenges and result in children and young people missing out on opportunities.

It is important that alongside maximising incomes through work or benefit entitlements, families are supported to reduce costs by maximising grants, accessing concessionary schemes and discounts where they are available. There is also a role for professionals working with children to increase the awareness of not limiting access to activities as a result of costs

Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Promote the uptake of clothing grants	Increase in the number of families claiming clothing grants	Aug 2022	Head of Revenues & Business Support
Encourage the uptake of concessionary leisure schemes for children with low income backgrounds	Increase in the number of concessionary leisure schemes	Dec 2022	High Life Highland
Promote and raise awareness of fuel discounts and grants and energy advice and switching services	Number of households opting to be referred by the Council for energy advice. Number of households benefiting from local fuel support schemes.	Aug 2022	Head of Revenues & Business Support
Implementation of the Northern Alliance <i>Cost of the School Day Toolkit</i>	Number of schools using the toolkit	Aug 2022	Area Education Managers

Theme: Costs of Living

Improvement priority:

Reduce the financial barriers on families

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

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Promote and raise awareness of fuel discounts and grants and energy advice and switching services	Number of households opting to be referred by the Council for energy advice. Number of households benefiting from local fuel support schemes.	Aug 2022	Head of Revenues & Business Support
Implementation of the Northern Alliance <i>Cost of the School Day Toolkit</i>	Number of schools using the toolkit	Aug 2022	Area Education Managers

Theme: Costs of Living**Improvement priority:**

Increase access to and uptake of affordable and flexible childcare

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to increase choice and flexibility of hours of provision within their area, alongside the expansion of entitlement to 600 hours per year. Scottish Government took parents' views and experiences on flexibility of current ELC provision, and in relation to how they might use the expanded entitlement of 1140 hours. Parents raised a range of issues or concerns around the extent to which current provision is sufficiently flexible, and the impact this can have on their choice of provider(s) and working arrangements:

A substantial number of parents felt there is not enough flexibility in current ELC provision. This was particularly the case for local authority provision. Several participants suggested that half-day nursery sessions are insufficient to enable parents to work, and some felt that only a small proportion of local authority nurseries offer flexibility in terms of longer sessions or places outside term time.

Parents on low incomes and living in the most deprived areas were more likely than others to prefer to use the 1140 funded hours with a local authority nursery, playgroup, family centre or childminder.

A little more than half (54%) of parents with children eligible for funded ELC indicated that they pay for at least some of the ELC they use for children aged under 6. The majority (69%) of those who pay for ELC for eligible children aged under 6 stated they have experienced affordability problems in the last 12 months. This included 18% of those who pay for eligible children who have experienced significant affordability problems. When asked about the nature of affordability difficulties, nearly all of those with experience of affordability problems mentioned the high cost of childcare (97%). Parents have also experienced other difficulties such as paying childcare fees upfront (26%), costs of trips or other activities (9%), paying refundable deposits (7%), and having to pay other upfront costs such as registration fees (7%).

Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Support and increase the uptake of 1140 hours ELC provision	Increase in uptake of 1140 hours	Aug 2022	Senior Manager Early Years
Support the uptake of eligible 2 year old ELC provision	Increase in uptake of eligible 2 places	Aug 2022	Senior Manager Early Years
Develop a strategy to promote awareness of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to support for childcare costs • Access to tax free childcare 	Strategy in place	Aug 2022	Head of Revenues and Business Support
Explore options with partnerships to support flexible models of childcare in individual communities	Options for flexible models of childcare developed	Aug 2022	Senior Manager Early Years

Theme: Income from social security and benefits in kind**Improvement priority:**

Maximise uptake of child related social security benefits

Needs assessment (Your objective and evidence based rationale for the priority)

A key route out of poverty is to increase incomes and ensure that all families receive the benefits that they are entitled to. Whilst around 1.8 million households of working age receive at least 80% of their income from benefits, it should be noted the welfare system supports a substantially greater number of households, through smaller income top-ups from the benefits system and about half of all working-age households currently receive some benefits. Even excluding child benefit - which all but the highest-income households are entitled to receive - the figure is about one in three.

With an increase in the number of people on reduced incomes as a result of covid, it is important to ensure that families are aware of all possible entitlements in order to maximise incomes and reduce poverty.

Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Maximise uptake of child specific benefits including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Start Grants • Child payment • Best start Food payment 	Increase the numbers claiming child specific benefits	April 2022	Head of Revenues and Business Support
Maximise uptake of DWP benefits, including those with childcare costs, including outcomes from the Council's Advice & Information contract.	Increase the numbers claiming DWP benefits and other entitlements	March 2022	Head of Revenues and Business Support
Raise awareness of entitlements and where to get support with a particular focus on changing circumstances with services, organisations, groups.	Increase in the number of people seeking support.	March 2022	Poverty Reduction Delivery Group
Implementation of health visitor financial inclusion pathway	All health visitors referring to Welfare Support Team	April 2022	Head of Health