

Agenda Item	10
Report No	CP/14/23

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 24 May 2023

Report Title: Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023

Report By: ECO Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 require listed public bodies including Local Authorities, local Education Authorities and Licensing Boards to review and report on equality work. In 2023, we are required to publish information on:
- two-yearly progress made towards achieving the Council’s equality outcomes (2021-2025) for the period 2021-23.
 - how equality is mainstreamed in the Council.
 - annual employee information including the progress made in gathering and using the information to better meet the duties of the legislation; and
 - the Council’s pay-gap.
- 1.2 Key areas of progress against the Council’s Equality work during the period 2021-2023 include:
- Improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers through investment in the Council’s four Gypsy / Traveller sites, and improvements to partnership working.
 - Community engagement and implementation of free period products was available in community settings in Highland.
 - New Recruitment and Selection guidance demonstrating a commitment to equality of opportunity.
 - A continued reduction in the Council’s Gender Pay Gap, from 5% (FY20/21) to 4.5% (FY21/22).
 - Introduction of a Reasonable Adjustments passport for staff who have a disability.
 - Development of a financial inclusion referral pathway for Health Visiting and Family Nurse Partnership to the Council’s Welfare team.
 - Delivery of Cost of Living Support Fund over winter 22/23, supporting 106 community organisations across Highland to deliver projects to address cost of living challenges.
 - Deaf Education Service’s 1+2 digital BSL pack has been bought by all local authorities in Scotland.
- 1.3 The purpose of this covering report is to introduce and summarise the Council’s Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2023. The full progress report can be found at **Appendix 1**.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- consider and note the Equality Outcome and Mainstreaming Progress Report for the Highland Council (and incorporating the Education Authority and Licensing Board) as detailed in Appendix 1; and
- approve the addition of a new equality outcome as outlined at section 9.4: *Increase the Council's understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services.*

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications

There are no new resource implications. The actions noted are taken forward within existing resources.

3.2 Legal implications

The Council, Education Authority and Licensing Board have a legal duty to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty; failure to comply has the potential to result in enforcement action, legal challenge or loss of reputation.

3.3 Community implications (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)

The themes and issues in the revised Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-2025 reflect ongoing equality priorities and, along with further actions identified to mainstream equality, will have a positive impact on the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010. These will contribute towards meeting the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty: to eliminate discrimination; advance equality; and foster good relations.

3.4 Progress on the Council's Equality Outcomes will be regularly monitored and as work progresses further consultation and engagement activities may need to be carried out which will help inform how we deliver or adapt our outcomes. The next mainstreaming progress report and review of Equality Outcomes will be due in 2025.

This is a progress report, so an equality impact assessment is not required.

3.5 Climate Change implications

There are no climate change implications arising from the report.

3.6 Risk implications

This report addresses the risk of non-compliance, as detailed above. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is responsible for monitoring compliance with the Specific Duties and has established the practice of undertaking reviews of compliance with reporting requirements.

3.7 Gaelic implications

There are no Gaelic implications arising from the report.

4. Background

4.1 The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of nine 'protected characteristics':

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

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

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

4.3 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 requires listed public bodies to publish information on equality work that contributes towards meeting the PSED. At this time, we are required to publish information on progress with:

- achieving previous Equality Outcomes for the two-year period 2021-2023.
- how equality is mainstreamed in the Council.
- annual employee data including the progress made in gathering and using the information to better meet the duties of the legislation.
- updated gender pay-gap information.

4.4 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the regulatory body responsible for monitoring compliance with the Specific Duties and has established the practice of undertaking reviews of compliance with reporting requirements. Information on progress should be published by the end of April 2023, however due to the timing of the Council Committee cycle, the EHRC has been informed that the publication of the Council's report will be at the end of May 2023. It should also be noted that the annual employee data is not currently available to publish and does not comprise part of this report. The reasons for this are detailed at paragraph 6.3. This data will be reported to the Corporate Resources Committee in September 2023.

5. Current Context

5.1 The Equality Act is the legal framework to help tackle disadvantage and discrimination historically faced by the protected characteristics above, also referred to as 'equality groups'. During the pandemic, for certain equality groups pre-existing inequalities were shown to widen both as a result of the virus and the measures taken to contain it. Some of those same groups of people are now disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

5.2 Evidence from the EHRC (Scotland) and the Scottish Government in 2021 shows that:

In employment:

- The impact of Covid disproportionately affected those on low incomes with little savings buffer, workers on less secure employment arrangements, women, young people, people from minority ethnic groups, lone parents and disabled people, as many of these work in 'shutdown' industries or sectors such as hospitality, tourism, manufacturing, entertainment, non-food retail and wholesale or because they are unable to work from home.

Access to services

- The loss of social support during the pandemic due to diminished or interrupted care and support made disabled people, ethnic minorities, older people and children and young people more vulnerable.
- Challenges in recruitment and retention of social care staff has negatively impacted service provision.

Social inequalities

- During Covid-19 there was a rise in reported domestic abuse and concerns have been raised about survivors' being able to access to support services.
- Adults identifying as LGBT, women and disabled people have poorer mental health and wellbeing.
- Young people and people from ethnic minority groups reported lower levels of trust and belonging in their neighbourhood.
- Racially aggravated crimes continue to be the most commonly reported hate crime with increases in those linked to sexual orientation, trans identity and religion,

Education

- Lower attainment and higher exclusions for disabled and Gypsy Traveller pupils.
- LGBT pupils experience high rates of bullying.

5.3 While all households in Scotland are affected by current increases in the cost of living, those with lower incomes and little or no savings are more likely to be disproportionately negatively affected due to spending a higher proportion than average on energy, food and transport and therefore being more affected by inflation and having less flexibility in their budget to cope with price rises.

5.4 A recent [Scottish Government's Analytical Report on the Cost of Living Crisis](#) notes that Households with low income are likely to include over representation from the following groups which are linked to at least one, or more, protected characteristic:

- disabled people
- lone parent families, which are more likely to be headed by women
- minority ethnic households
- other child poverty priority group households^[72] (3+ children, mother under 25, baby under 1)
- young adults (under 25)
- people with no recourse to public funds
- people with multiple complex needs

5.5 The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has further highlighted that particular types of household are far more likely to be in deep or very deep poverty, including single person households, disabled people and minority ethnic households. A current Parliamentary Inquiry into the [Cost of living: impact on rural communities in Scotland](#) demonstrates that the 'rural premium' experienced by people living in rural areas (meaning they face higher costs) can particularly affect women, families with children, individuals with caring responsibilities and disabled people, both in relation to their health and wellbeing but also in accessing services.

6. Reporting Requirements

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

6.2 **Mainstreaming Equality**

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

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

The report in Appendix 1 comprises of 2 sections:

1. An overview of how equality is mainstreamed into the work of the Council, the Education Authority, and the Licensing Board
2. Progress with Equality Outcomes during 2021-2023.

6.3 **Employee Information**

As part of the equality reporting requirements, the Council must publish an annual breakdown of the information collected under its duty to gather and use employee information by protected characteristics and provide details of the progress that it has made in using that information. Some elements of pay gap information are provided below in section 7 but in the main this data is currently being collated and will be reported to the Corporate Resources Committee during September.

7. Employee and Pay Gap information

- 7.1 Since 2013, the Council has been required to publish information on its gender pay gap on an annual basis. This includes the percentage difference among its employees, between men's average hourly pay and women's hourly pay, and is one of the Council's Statutory performance indicators.
- 7.2 The Council's pay gap information indicates that the gender pay gap overall has reduced from 5% (FY20/21) to 4.5% (FY21/22). The updated 2023 position and breakdown of this data across the organisation, is currently being collated and will be published and reported to committee as indicated in paragraph 6.3.
- 7.3 The Council has undertaken an exercise to fully consolidate the Scottish Local Government Living Wage (SLGLW) rate with the development of a new pay and grading model. This reintroduces incremental progression for staff on lower grades. A screening for equality and socio-economic impact was carried out on the new pay and grading model as part of its development and this indicated a potential positive impact on gender pay. Revised pay gap and employee information will be published in September following the update to the Corporate Resources Committee.

8. Mainstreaming Progress 2021-2023

- 8.1 Progress on Mainstreaming Equality is required every 2 years and therefore work towards achieving Equality Outcomes was last reported to Committee in May 2021. At that point, a new series of Equality Outcomes was agreed. The accompanying report at Appendix 1 includes details of the progress made during the period 2021-2023, and includes a wide range of service activities, including:
- 8.2 Tackling discrimination and reducing barriers to services
- *Improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers: This is being led by the Housing Service through sourcing investment to support improvements to each of the Council's four Gypsy / Traveller sites. The aim is to work with residents and transform where they live into 'great places to live and bring up children'. This is a key priority and to deliver it the service has been successful in sourcing funding from various Scottish Government budgets including the Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Fund, Vacant & Derelict Land Improvement Programme, and Net Zero Energy fund. There is also a refreshed approach to working with partners to achieve these aims.*
 - *Since April 2022, work has been progressed to implement the requirements of the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021. This is to ensure that the provision of free period products is available in community settings in Highland to everyone who needs them and in an accessible way that respects the dignity of the people obtaining them. This is in addition to the products being freely available for pupils in Highland schools since 2018.*

- *The Licensing Committee has undertaken Violence Against Women Training in order to raise awareness about gender based violence to support their work on licensing matters.*

8.3 Inclusive approaches

- *Key priorities for the Council's BSL Plan focus on work carried out the Deaf Education Service based at Dingwall Academy, and the continued delivery of BSL/English interpretation services to support access to both Council and NHS Highland services.*
- *The Deaf Education Service has delivered Scotvec units, Signature qualifications SQA units and more recently the SQA National Awards in BSL. The service has developed a popular 1+2 digital BSL used in Highland schools and, as a result, there are more people learning BSL in Highland than in any other region in Scotland. All other local authorities in Scotland have bought the pack.*
- *Since the last Mainstreaming report in 2021, the Council has expanded its work with refugees and displaced persons. In addition, to housing and supporting Syrian Refugee families, the Council and partners have welcomed and supported Afghan families and displaced people from Ukraine.*
- *In 2021/22, a joint Public Health, Welfare and Health Visitor project, involving health visitors and the Welfare Team has nurtured a financial inclusion pathway across Highland with all Health Visitors and Family Nurse Partnership asking about financial matters at first point of contact. A referral pathway is now operating to enable Health Staff to refer to the Council's Welfare Team. The project was awarded a Scottish national financial inclusion award in 2021/22 for the collaborative approach, developed referral pathways and positive outcomes for family incomes.*

8.4 Employment and occupational segregation:

- *A new People Strategy has been developed for 2022-2027 which includes specific commitments and actions related to equality, diversity and inclusion.*
- *New Recruitment and Selection guidance aims to ensure that the Council demonstrates a commitment to equality of opportunity at all stages of the recruitment and selection process.*
- *As an employer, the Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for staff who are disabled. Under our commitment to being a Disability Confident employer the Council has introduced a 'Reasonable Adjustment Passport' scheme in May 2022. This is a record of adjustments agreed between a worker who has a long-term health condition or disability and their manager and can move between role with an employee.*

- *The combined gender pay gap require to be reported annually as a Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) and continues to show a reducing trend. The most recent SPI reported a 4.5% gap in 2021/22, from 5% in 2020/21, 5.8% in 2019, 7.2% in 2017, and 9.3% in 2013.*

9. **Equality Outcomes Progress 2021-25**

- 9.1 Public bodies are required to publish a set of equality outcomes every four years and to report on progress every two years. Equality outcomes should set out our priorities for activity that will help to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations for relevant protected characteristic groups.
- 9.2 Public bodies should consider relevant equality evidence and take reasonable steps to involve equality groups. Evidence can include involvement of equality stakeholder as well as national research.
- 9.3 The Council's current 9 Equality Outcomes were agreed in 2021 for the period 2021-2025. These are outlined below and progress on activity to date is detailed in Section 2 of Appendix 1.

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2021 – 2025		Lead Service
1	A more diverse workforce that reflects our community	Corporate Resources – HR
2	Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making.	Communities and Place
3	In Highland, people from identified groups feel respected and equally safe from harm.	Health and Social Care
4	With Partners in Highland, work to reduce socio-economic disadvantage for people from identified groups in the light of Covid-19 in line with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan	Communities and Place
5	In Highland, people from identified groups, including young people, will have improved access to the resources needed to support their mental health and wellbeing.	Health and Social Care, Education and Learning Corporate Resources - HR
6	Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality through delivery of curriculum for excellence and wider school approaches following the principles of the Highland Practice Model and SHANNARI.	Education and Learning
7	Increase the number of young people with protected characteristics leaving school moving into positive and sustained destinations.	Education and Learning
8	Reduce attainment and achievement gaps between pupils with protected characteristics and also those living in poverty.	Education and Learning

9	We will meet the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning – reduce exclusions, improve the attainment of pupils looked after by the local authority, support for children from armed forces families.	Education and Learning
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9.4 *Proposed New Outcome*

Although this is not due to be reviewed until 2025, it is proposed to add a new outcome to our existing Equality Outcomes to reflect the duties relating to children’s rights as outlined in the United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

9.5 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international treaty that sets out the rights of children aged from 0 to 18 years old including the right to an identity, to education and to play. It is expected that a Bill introduced in the Scottish Parliament incorporating the UNCRC into Scot’s law, will come forward with the Bill aiming to ensure that:

- children’s rights are respected and protected in the law in Scotland
- public authorities are legally required to respect and protect children’s rights in all the work that they do.

9.6 The proposed new outcome reflects the need to ensure the incorporation of Children’s Rights into services across the Council and this is reflected in the recommendations of this paper. This wording of the proposed outcome is:

Increase the Council’s understanding of Children’s Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services.

Key areas of activity would include:

- Undertake awareness raising sessions with staff and members
- Consider implications of implementation for Services and develop relevant actions

10. **Conclusions and next steps**

10.1 The full effects of Covid-19 and the current cost-of living crisis are still to be fully understood, especially in the context of how certain groups or people are affected. Our equality priorities and associated actions will continue to evolve to reflect the needs of our communities. For example, issues such as transport and digital inclusion may need further consideration.

10.2 Other external influences on equality work in the coming years will include the Scottish Government review of Public Sector Equality Duty Specific Duties in Scotland, the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into the law in Scotland, and the proposed introduction of a Human Rights Framework for Scotland. There is the opportunity to engage on these developments through the national Equality Officer Network and through COSLA.

- 10.3 Our Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023 outlines the steps taken to mainstream equality into the work of the Council and to identify priorities. We are aware that continuous improvement is needed to embed equality in our activities and decision making; and efforts to raise awareness with staff and members.
- 10.4 Priority activities for 2023-2025 include:
- Review and improve the Council's approach to impact assessment which will include assessment for impact relating to equality, socio-economic and children's rights impacts. This is being taken forward through the Integrated Impact Assessment project which is being led by a cross-Service officer team.
 - Refresh equality and diversity training for all staff and members, and impact assessment training to accompany the priority above.
 - Work with the national body CEMVO (a partner of the Scottish Government's Equality Unit) to consider anti-racist approaches to recruitment and support work on employee data gathering.
 - The *My Council* programme (a Redesign Project) will take an inclusive approach to improving customer contact methods (digital, telephony, face to face). This will mean understanding the needs of all customers and including the barriers that certain equality groups face when contacting the Council.
 - Increase awareness and understanding of the United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across relevant Council Services and this will be supported through the adoption of a new equality outcome as outlined at paragraph 9.4.
- 10.5 Members are asked to note that the next monitoring report will be reported in April/May 2025 and this will also include the 4-yearly review of the Council's Equality Outcomes. As noted at paragraph 6.3 a further report will be presented to the September Corporate Resources Committee outlining the employee and pay gap information.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 11 May 2023

Authors: Rosemary Mackinnon, Principal Policy Officer – Equality,
Alison Clark, Head of Community Support, Contact and Engagement
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Appendix 1: Mainstreaming and Outcomes Update 2023

Authors: Rosemary MacKinnon, Principal Policy Officer - Equalities
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THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL



May 2023

Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023

This is the Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023 on behalf of the Highland Council, Highland Education Authority and Highland Licensing Board. It demonstrates our continuing aim to advance equality and shows how we build equality into our work through activities and case studies and presents our progress for the period 2021-2023.

Highland Council Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2023

[Introduction and summary of progress](#)

[Context](#)

[Section 1 Mainstreaming Equality: 2021-2023](#)

[1.1 Leadership, decision making, performance and attitudes](#)

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

[1.3 Engaging and involving communities](#)

[1.4 Awareness and promotion](#)

[1.5 Partnership Working](#)

[1.6 Education](#)

[1.7 Licensing Board](#)

[1.8 Highland Council BSL Plan 2018-2024 update](#)

[Section 2 Equality Outcomes](#)

[2.1 Progress with equality outcomes 2021-2025](#)

Introduction

The Highland Council's Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2023 details progress on the equality work of Highland Council, the Education Authority, and the Licensing Board for the period 2021-23.

The Highland Council has made an ongoing commitment to give regard to the three elements of the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The duty means we must consider how our policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010 – the nine protected characteristics.

We aim to work with our partners and with our communities to reduce inequality, to tackle poverty and discrimination, and to embed equality and human rights across all areas of our work.

The Council's previous mainstreaming report in 2021 was published against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic which nationally saw a disproportionate impact on many people already affected by pre-existing and persistent inequalities, especially for younger people, black and minority ethnic people, disabled people, and women. Now in 2023, we see the effects of a cost of living crisis, which again significantly impacts many of the same groups and individuals.

Addressing long standing inequalities provides opportunities to remove or minimise disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics, and to help promote a Highland that is fairer for all.

Summary of Progress 2021 - 2023

Progress on Mainstreaming Equality and a review of the Council's Equality Outcomes was last reported to Committee in May 2021. Some key areas of progress during 2021-2023 include:

- Improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers through investment in the Council's four Gypsy / Traveller sites, and improvements to partnership working.
- Community engagement and implementation of free period products was available in community settings in Highland.
- New Recruitment and Selection guidance demonstrating a commitment to equality of opportunity.
- A continued reduction in the Council's Gender Pay Gap, from 5% (FY20/21) to 4.5% (FY21/22).
- Introduction of a Reasonable Adjustments passport for staff who have a disability.
- Development of a financial inclusion referral pathway for Health Visiting and Family Nurse Partnership to the Council's Welfare team.
- Delivery of Cost of Living Support Fund over winter 22/23, supporting 106 community organisations across Highland to deliver projects to address cost of living challenges.
- Deaf Education Service's 1+2 digital BSL pack has been bought by all local authorities in Scotland.

Legal context and requirements

Public Sector Equality Duty:

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

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

These requirements apply across the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The Scottish Specific Equality Duties:

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

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

Fairer Scotland Duty: The Fairer Scotland (Socio-economic) Duty came into force in 2018, placing a legal responsibility on public bodies, 'pay due regard' to how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions.

National context

Equality law is in general a reserved matter for Westminster, however the Scottish Parliament has powers to impose duties on Scottish public authorities and to encourage equal opportunities. Tackling inequality is central to Scottish Government policies, with many actions being taken forward or planned to ensure equality, inclusion and human rights are central to supporting the achievement of key outcomes in the [National Performance Framework](#). Plans and actions include:

- [Race Equality Immediate Priorities Plan \(IPP\)](#)
- [Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers](#)
- [Delivery plan of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities](#)
- [Fairer Scotland Action Plan](#)

- [Employability: No one Left Behind](#)
- [Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women](#)
- [The British Sign Language \(BSL\) National Plan](#)
- [Reform of the Gender Recognition Act](#)
- [A connected Scotland](#)
- [New Scots Strategy](#)

Evidence from the EHRC (Scotland) and the Scottish Government highlights that:

In employment:

- The impact of Covid disproportionately affected those on low incomes with little savings, workers on less secure employment arrangements, women, young people, people from minority ethnic groups, lone parents and disabled people, as many of these worked in 'shutdown' industries or sectors such as hospitality, tourism, manufacturing, entertainment, non-food retail and wholesale or because they are unable to work from home.

Access to services

- The loss of social support during the pandemic due to diminished or interrupted care and support made disabled people, ethnic minorities, older people and children and young people more vulnerable.
- Challenges in recruitment and retention of social care staff has negatively impacted service provision.

Social inequalities

- During Covid-19 there was a rise in reported domestic abuse and concerns have been raised about survivors' being able to access to support services.
- Adults identifying as LGBT, women and disabled people have poorer mental health and wellbeing.
- Young people and people from ethnic minority groups reported lower levels of trust and belonging in their neighbourhood.
- Racially aggravated crimes continue to be the most commonly reported hate crime with increases in those linked to sexual orientation, trans identity and religion,

Education

- Lower attainment and higher exclusions for disabled and Gypsy Traveller pupils.
- LGBT pupils experience high rates of bullying.

Poverty

All households in Scotland are affected by current increases in the cost of living, however those with lower incomes and little or no savings are more likely to be disproportionately negatively affected due to spending a higher proportion than

average on energy, food and transport and therefore being more affected by inflation and having less flexibility in their budget to cope with price rises.

A recent [Scottish Government's Analytical Report on the Cost of Living Crisis](#) notes that Households with low income are likely to include over representation from the following groups which are linked to at least one, or more, protected characteristic: disabled people; lone parent families, which are more likely to be headed by women; minority ethnic households; other child poverty priority group households (3+ children, mother under 25, baby under 1); young adults (under 25); people with no recourse to public funds; and people with multiple complex needs

The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has further highlighted that particular types of household are far more likely to be in deep or very deep poverty, including single person households, disabled people and minority ethnic households.

A current Parliamentary Inquiry into the [Cost of living: impact on rural communities in Scotland](#) demonstrates that the 'rural premium' experienced by people living in rural areas (meaning they face higher costs) can particularly affect women, families with children, individuals with caring responsibilities and disabled people, both in relation to their health and wellbeing but also in accessing services.

Local context

Highland Council provides essential services in the largest geographical region in Scotland, covering a third of the landmass of Scotland, and is one of the largest employers in the area with around 10 000 employees. National Population Estimates published by the National Records of Scotland in 2022 show that:

- Between 2001 and 2021 - the population of Highland has increased by 13.9 per cent (Scotland-wide increase of 8.2 per cent) to 238,060 in 2021.
- Population of Highland Council Area is the 7th largest of 32 Councils in Scotland

The Census continues to be a key source of population data and equality. The Scotland Census due in 2021 was delayed until 2022 and the results are not yet available, therefore some of the data we hold is dated, but includes:

- 51% of the population is female and 49% is male, similar to Scotland overall.
- Highland has an older population when compared to the rest of Scotland. 23.2% of the population of Highland is over 65, compared to 19.6% of Scotland (2021). In the 20 years between 2001 and 2021, people in Highland aged 65 to 74 increased by 57.3 per cent, and people aged 75+ increased by 60.6 per cent.
- According to the Census 2011, 18.6% of the Highland population report having a long-term condition or disability. Many disabled people continue to face barriers that relate to the built environment; people's attitudes; the way people communicate; and how organisations are run.

- Highland has a less ethnically diverse population than other areas of Scotland; most people identify as having a 'white' ethnic background. The minority ethnic (non-white) population of Highland in the Census Scotland 2011 was 1.4% of the total, up from 0.8% in 2001, but compared to 4% for Scotland overall. According to the 2011 Census, Highland had higher-than-average Polish and Gypsy/Traveller populations.
- During Covid, concerns were raised nationally and locally in Highland of a rise in domestic abuse and the impact on women, children, young people and families.
- Scottish Government (SSCQ) estimates in 2021, 26% of adults aged 16 years and over in Scotland had a limiting long-term physical or mental health condition, or illness, for Highland the figure was 25%. The likelihood of having a limiting, long-term condition increases with age.
- The most common response to the question of faith in the 2011 Census was 'No religion' in Highland and Scotland. The second most popular faith was Church of Scotland, and the percentage is higher in Highland (36.9%) than in Scotland (32.4%)
- We know that nationally the risk of poverty is higher for women, disabled people, black minority ethnic people, lone parents, and children and young people; This may be further exacerbated for people living in rural areas such as Highland due to higher costs for food, fuel and transport.

Section 1 Mainstreaming Equality 2021 – 2023

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

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

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

A number of case studies are used to illustrate this work; these by no means capture all the ways that equality is mainstreamed into the Council and further examples can be found in previous Mainstreaming Equality reports on the Council website [here](#).

1.1 Leadership and decision making

Elected members have an important role to play in championing equality within the council, as well as a scrutiny role to ensure that equality considerations are included in the decision making and governance of the council.

The effects of both Covid and the cost-of-living crisis on Highland communities have informed many of the short to medium term priorities of the Council's new programme. [Our Future Highland](#) is about bringing people together to promote wellbeing, to reduce inequalities and to deliver improved outcomes against the following priorities.

- A Fair and Caring Highland
- Resilient and Sustainable Communities
- Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes
- A Sustainable Highland.
- A Resilient and Sustainable Council

Progress reports on how the Council meets its equality duties are presented to the Communities and Place Committee. Relevant matters are also brought to other committees, for example:

- [Corporate Resources Committee](#) – staffing and welfare reform
- [Economy and Infrastructure Committee](#) – employability, community wealth building
- [Education and Learning Committee](#) – Additional Support Needs, attainment, bullying
- [Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee](#) – social care (disability, age), Mental Health, Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

- [Housing and Property Committee](#) – Gypsy/Travellers, Refugee Resettlement, access to affordable rented and accessible rented housing.

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

A cross-service officer group, the Fairer Highland group, chaired by the Head of Community Support, Contact and Engagement oversees and monitors equality work across the Council. A Highland UNCRC Equalities Forum has recently been re-established by the Education and Learning Service to focus on ensuring and promoting Children's Rights & Equality across Highland.

Oversight of equality work sits within the Council's Communities and Place service and includes management of foreign language and BSL interpretation services. The service also leads on Poverty Reduction work, Community Planning, and Community Support – Contact and Engagement.

Performance Indicators

Statutory performance indicators (SPIs) are set by the Accounts Commission for Scotland and provide basic information to citizens on how individual Councils perform. Additionally, each of Scotland's councils measure their performance against a set of benchmarking indicators so that performance can be compared to other councils in Scotland.

There are two Corporate Services SPIs directly relevant to equality:

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

The most recent published SPIs cover the period 2021-2022.

Corporate Services	Highland			Scotland (21/22)		
	Rank 20/21	Rank 21/22	FY 21/22	Average	Min	Max
CORP03b – Women managers in top 5% of earners	15 th	28 th	51%	59%	30%	63%
CORP03c – Gender Pay Gap	23 rd	21 st	4.5%	3.5%	14.1%	-3.7%

Gender balance in more senior Council posts

The indicator used here is the proportion of women managers in the top 5% of earners in the council. Despite an improvement in 2020/21 figures, the Council continues to be behind the progress made across most local authorities. For similar authorities (our family group) the Council is the same as the family group average at of 51%.

Gender pay gap for staff in the council

The Council's combined gender pay gap has improved significantly over the past ten years, and there has been a slight improvement since 2021 in where we rank

compared to other Councils. Our target is to at least achieve the Scottish average. The transfer of a significant number of employees to NHS Highland as part of Integrated care, and to Highlife Highland as part of its establishment, means that comparison with other Scottish Local Authorities is problematic. For similar authorities (our family group) the Council has a slightly stronger position on the gender pay gap with the family group average at 6.3% compared to the Council's 4.5% for 2021/22.

The Council has introduced a revised pay model effective from April 2021 and paid to staff in May 2023 based on the equality impact screening demonstrated a positive impact on gender pay gap.

Gender Pay Gap Analysis

31.03.2022	Before Pay Modelling	After Pay Modelling
All Employees	5%	3.9%

Further detailed analysis is being undertaken to provide the update for 2023 gender pay gap reporting.

Other useful links are:

[My local Council benchmarking](#)

[SPIs Benchmarking and Best Value report 2021-2022](#)

1.2 Building equality into our work (services and information)

The Highland Council delivers a wide range of services and functions across the largest geographic region in the UK.

Three key activities proposed in the 2021 mainstreaming report are all underway:

- Review of equality and Diversity training.
- Review of impact assessment processes
- A review of HR policies

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

Assessing Impact

The Council's current approach to assessing impact comes under the heading of Community Impacts incorporates the legal requirement to assess for Equality, as well Socio-Economic ('Fairer Scotland Duty'), and a Council commitment to Rural, considerations.

Work has started in 2023 to improve our approach to impact assessments and to consider a wider integrated approach to help us inform policies and understand impacts on service users and employees.

Case Study Housing & Property Services:

The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) undertaken as part of the Highland Housing Register Allocation Policy Review, highlighted possible impacts from proposed changes. The process helped with decision making and led mitigating action being taken. Equality Impact Assessments have also been carried out as part of the process of developing the Council's Homeless / Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan; the Mobility Scooter Permissions Policy and the updating of the Tenant Participation Strategy.

Other examples of equality impact assessments carried out or underway are on built environment projects at Riverside way and Academy Street, Inverness.

Improving monitoring and understanding of equalities information

Some of Highland's most vulnerable people use the Council's services and many have one or more of the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010. Equality and diversity monitoring of services can help identify current and future needs, possible inequalities including problems accessing or using services and information, as well as checking that a cross-section of people have been reached and given their views.

Case study: Monitoring housing allocations

The Housing Regulator expects landlords to comply with equality legislation, as stated in the Scottish Social Housing Charter: "...every tenant and other customer have their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services."

Housing allocation outcomes (lets) are monitored each year. Limited equalities data on our tenants has meant we have not always been able to understand how best to meet needs or monitor how well we are meeting our equalities duties. Changes are being made to our housing IT management system and approaches, in line with national guidance, which will enable us to collect, hold and utilise better equalities information on our tenants and to ensure we act fairly in relation to tenant services.

In addition to the day-to-day work of the Council such as working to improve access to the build environment, ensuring access to inclusive communication such as the provision of interpretation, responding to gender-based violence, there are always new initiatives that have a significant relevance to equality. During 2021-2023, provisions have been put in place to make free period products widely available in Highland.

Case study: [Implementing free period product provision in Highland](#)

In April 2022, the Council employed a project co-ordinator to develop and implement the provision of free period products in community settings Highland, so they are available to everyone who needs them. This was required to be in place by August 2022; provision for free period products had already been in place in schools since 2018/19. Throughout this work, efforts have been made to ensure that products are

reasonably easy to obtain and provided in a way that respects the dignity of those obtaining them.

Following a public consultation, arrangements were put in place and are set out in a [Statement on Exercise of Functions](#). Key achievements include:

- Over 80 pick-up locations, these include at Council Service Points; High Life Highland leisure centres and libraries, and through CFine groups.
- An online ordering service for anyone who is not easily able to access pick-up points. This is also used for the delivery of reusable products.
- Supporting work in schools to understand awareness and use of the scheme.

The Council as an employer

People Strategy 2022-2027

Equality, diversity, and inclusion form key elements of the Council's People Strategy across our recruitment and employment policies and practices. We aim to encourage a workplace culture of dignity, respect and engagement, and to equip our staff with the skills and confidence needed to deliver on equality, diversity and inclusion as an employer and service provider. Key equality activities relating to the Strategy are:

- Full consolidation of Living Wage rate
- Continue to address gender pay gap
- Promoting the Reasonable Adjustments Passport Scheme as part of Disability Confident
- Working towards the Equally Safe at Work Bronze accreditation
- Modern Apprentice (MA) opportunities are available to all staff
- Commitment to the Young Person Guarantee to help address the age demographic of the Council and have a positive impact due to benefits derived from generational diverse teams
- Promote a more diverse workforce through revised recruitment and selection policy as part of the Talent Strategy
- Improve our understanding of how our workforce profile reflects the wider community
- Review our equality, diversity and inclusion learning and development opportunities
- Introduction of the new Payroll/HR System and promoting improved ways for staff to input their personal equality information in the current system
- Introduction of Carer Positive Policy with an initial EQIA demonstrating a positive impact on gender and age characteristics

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/80639/11_people_strategy

Case Study: Equally Safe at Work Accreditation

The Highland Council is working with [Close the Gap](#) towards achieving bronze accreditation for [Equally Safe at Work](#), an employer accreditation programme which supports employers to improve their employment practice to advance gender equality at work and prevent Violence Against Women.

Over 70% of women reported having experienced or witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace in Scotland (Close the Gap). The Highland Council aims to prevent sexual harassment by raising awareness, implementing workplace policies, and introducing capacity building training.

A revised standalone Sexual Harassment Policy, and Gender-Based Violence Policy are being developed to communicate the Council's zero tolerance approach to any form of Gender-Based Violence, recognising that experience of Gender-Based Violence is not limited to women. Other workplace policies are also being reviewed to ensure gender sensitivity.

Building Equality into our Work - key actions 2023-2025

- The review of equality and diversity training is underway, and will include a mandatory online module, as well as options for blended delivery, and training to accompany a revised impact assessment approach.
- Led by the Council's Transformation team, a project is underway in 2023 to consider and make recommendations to improve the Council's approach to equality and other forms of impact assessment to help improve policy development and decision making.
- The aim of the [My Council](#) Programme is to review and create a joined-up customer contact experience at the Highland Council, including the opportunities to further utilise digital approaches to support improved outcomes for our citizens, our staff, and the Council. By developing self-service digital options for those who can use it, resources are released to better support customers who need it the most.
The focus of the project is putting the citizen at the centre of customer engagement at the Highland Council, to improve our process and approach for all contact methods (digital, telephony, face to face) and to provide a seamless customer experience.

1.3 Engaging and involving communities

The Council, Education Authority, and Licensing Board use a wide range of methods to engage with communities in Highland. This includes surveys, a Public Performance Survey (although last undertaken in 2019), formal and informal consultation with community groups, consultations with elected members, a Licensing Forum, Community Councils, Community Partnerships, pupil and parent engagement in schools, tenant engagement, and our day-to-day contact with customers. Social media and other forms of digital data gathering are increasingly used as practical alternatives given the geography of Highland.

Coming out of Covid, the Communities and Place Service developed a Framework for Engagement and involvement to support services and community work moves beyond the resilience focus, providing an opportunity to build on the engagement and networks through the covid period to establish a stronger relationship with communities and community bodies. From August 2021, the Council employed 10 temporary funded Community Support Coordinators whose role it was to support communities to engage and get involved in service priority planning and delivery. CSCs have a key role in encouraging inclusive approaches to involvement and participation across communities through the course of their activity. This focus on promoting equality and tackling inequalities is also embedded in the Council's approach to Place Based Planning and will inform our work to engage with equality groups going forward.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/76899/item_4ii_developing_a_framework_for_participation_and_involvement

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

There is regular engagement at local level with the current six Access Panels in Highland with regard to work on the build environment in particular. During 2022-23, the Council has liaised with the umbrella body for the Panels, Disability Equality Scotland, to encourage the re-establishment of a Panel for the Inverness area which has not been meeting since 2019.

Some examples of recent engagement activities include:

Case Study: Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers

Supporting tenants on the Longman Park site since 2021 through regular Tenant Participation input to be actively involved in the transformation of their homes, site and its facilities. They are now working with an architect to design their homes and site facilities (including a new community hub) This has been key to Highland Council securing significant Scottish Government funding to redevelop their accommodation and site facilities. On the back of this capacity building activity, the women have also established a group so that they can meet regularly to focus on issues of interest to them and share skills.

Elsewhere in Highland, housing officers are engaging with other members from the community with the aim of empowering them to become actively involved in accommodation and related issues and decisions which affect their lives.

Case study: Cost of Living Support Fund

In the final months of 2022, a Fund was established as part of the Council's approach to mitigating the impacts of the current cost of living crisis. Community groups from across the Highland area were encouraged to apply with projects that would support this aim during the winter months (to help ease the effects of the cost-of-living crisis). Individuals and households on lower incomes are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the current cost of living crisis, including certain equality groups, and therefore likely to benefit the most from the activities awarded funding.

Successful applications are detailed in the report in the link above. These included applications from faith groups, the Chinese Association, Women's Aid groups, mental health support groups, dementia groups to deliver local community hub provision targeted at specific groups within the community e.g. youth provision, older people, displaced Ukrainian families, those living alone and those who are experiencing food poverty/fuel poverty Women's Aid.

Case study: Inclusive Housing and Independent Living group

Supported by our Tenant Participation Team, tenants are setting up an 'Inclusive Housing and Independent Living Group' to make sure that the issues faced by tenants who have lived experience of disability, older tenants; carers and; parents of children with disabilities / long term health conditions are heard and listened to. It builds on the success of the Disabled Tenants Panel which provided excellent input, and lived experience, into the development of a policy aimed at reducing fire from mobility scooters.

Case study: Community Support Coordinators

Area-based Community Support Coordinators were appointed for 18 months in August 2021 and facilitated a wide range of interactions with community groups across Highland during their first six months' activity in this new role. Key aspects of the role included supporting communities recovering from the pandemic and encouraging participation and involvement in Council priority setting, re-focusing partnership priorities and supporting place-based planning

The CSC posts undertook actions to tackle inequalities which supported Community Partnership/Locality Plan priorities and to effectively meet need, including assisting groups to:

- develop mental health and wellbeing priorities.
- take inclusive approached to activities, engagement and consultation.
- apply for funding (Nairn Access Panel; Chinese Association).
- develop intergenerational projects.
- support project to address loneliness and isolation

Engaging and involving communities – Key actions going forward:

- Continue to use the Engagement Framework to encourage inclusive approaches to engagement with equality groups.
- Consider the contact needs of specific groups as part of the My Council Programme.

1.4 Awareness and promotion

Aside from staff training, a range of methods are used to raise awareness of, and to promote, equality with employees, Members and communities, from specific initiatives and events to the use of social media. These are links to some examples of external promotion during 2021-2023:

- 04/05/2021 [How to access BSL interpretation \(during Covid\)](#)
- 04/06 2021 [INCLUDE: School guidance promoted by Education Scotland](#)
- 13/092021 [Nairnshire Dial-A-Bus service - electric, wheelchair accessible vehicle](#)
- 16/09/2021 [Rosebank Primary receive rights respecting school accreditation.](#)
- 22/09/2021 [Flexible/adaptive housing project in Fort Augustus](#)
- 25/11/2021 [16 Days of Activism: Highland Violence Against Women Partnership](#)
- 02/02/2022 [Dalneigh Primary School awarded Silver Rights Respecting Award](#)
- 10/02/2022 [Members agree to appoint Older People's Champion](#)
- 14/02/2022 [Success of Highland's 1+2 BSL digital pack](#)
- 27/06/2022 [Pride month 2022 – Rainbow flag at Council HQ](#)
- 27.07/2022 [Inaugural Highland Menopause Café set to take place](#)
- 16/09/2022 [Employability Challenge Fund](#)
- 04/10/2022 [Challenge Poverty Week 2022](#)
- 05/10/2022 [World Mental Health Day](#)
- 10/10/2022 [Cost of Living Support Grant](#)
- 10/11/2022 [Supporting Community Transport Initiatives](#)
- 16/11/2022 [Members commend access to free period products in Highland](#)
- 24/11/2022 [Supporting Ukrainian pupils and their families](#)
- 06/02/2022 [Children's Mental Health Week](#)
- 15/03/2023 [Nairn Access Panel – Access Platform for Nairn Links Beach](#)

Awareness and Promotion – Key actions going forward:

- Continue to promote initiatives and activities via social media and other options.

1.5 Partnership Working

Community Planning Partners in Highland make commitments to tackling inequality in the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and equality/inclusion is a cross-cutting theme

While historically there has been a history of local partners working together on equality and diversity activity, including raising awareness of hate crime, joint training and shared equality outcomes, this has been more limited since the pandemic.

However specific partnership activities continue with a strong equality connection:

- Jointly tendered with NHS Highland for interpretation services in 2021.
- Maintaining partnership arrangements for BSL interpretation with NHS Highland.
- Highland Council is an active member of the Violence against Women partnership.
- The lead model approaches to integrated Children's and Adult Services.

Case study: Improving Lives of Gypsy Travellers

A Delivery Group has been set up with representatives from across key council services and partner organisations. Its purpose is to improve the lives of Gypsy / Travellers and their health and well-being outcomes and contribute to a fairer Highland. It aims to help do this by

- facilitating services to identify their contributing actions and drive these forward
- pulling together actions into a delivery plan
- monitoring and helping to report progress on the actions
- encouraging and providing opportunities for engagement and communication with members of the Gypsy Traveller community
- supporting the National Strategy - [Improving-lives-scotlands-gypsy-travellers-2019-2021](#)

Recent activities have included running a well-received awareness raising session and focused discussions on possible contributions.

Case study: Supporting and Welcoming Displaced People into Highland

The Highland Council continues to lead on work with partners to support and welcome refugees and people displaced by war or unrest to the area. Through

various national programmes, this includes: 37 households from Afghanistan and Syria since 2020; around 650 Ukrainian Displaced People; and recently a small number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

We work with partner organisations to ensure that families are able to live in safe and welcoming communities and are able to thrive and rebuild their lives. Services from across the Council and partner agencies provide support with accessing services such as:

- safe and secure accommodation.
- education (starting from the point of arrival).
- income maximisation and employment services.
- ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) opportunities, and
- health services and primary care

Partnership Working - Key actions going forward:

- Re-tender for interpretation services with NHS Highland due in 2024/5.
- Maintain partnership working to improve lives of Gypsy/Travellers in Highland
- Roll out of Whole Family Approach; holistic approach to support based on supporting at time of need and not crisis

1.6 Education and Learning

Education Services in Highland are delivered by the Education and Learning Service. Ensuring the promotion of equality, diversity and children's rights is central to the Council's work with children, young people and families.

The Highland Council has 203 schools, including 29 secondary schools, across its geography and over 30, 000 pupils. As across Scotland, Education services were significantly affected by the measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 and are continuing to recover from that period.

The purpose of the Council's 3-18 curriculum is to ensure that all children and young people gain the knowledge and skills they need to achieve a positive destination and performance should be judged on the entirety of our educational provision from early years to the senior phase. Primary phase performance improved significantly in 2021/22 and Highland is the second most improved local authority in Scotland for literacy and numeracy.

[Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People](#)

Members of the Education and Learning Committee were recently presented with the Education & Learning Raising Attainment Action Plan which includes the key objective of improving effectiveness of additional support for learning services in accordance with national action plan for supporting learners, The Promise and the UNCRC Children's Rights Scheme, as well as planning and implementing targeted interventions to address poverty related attainment gaps.

The plan includes priority actions for Additional Support for Learning to review the structures, systems and services that underpin Highland's approach to Additional Support for Learning with the following expected impacts:

- Completed review of Additional Support for Learning in Highland to support and improve outcomes for all learners and create implementation plan to respond to the findings.
- Develop strategies to systematically gather the views of young people with additional support needs to inform local authority policies and procedures.
- Engage with partners, including parents and carers to develop and deliver ways of working that support and promote positive relationships, communication and address barriers that may arise.
- Improve awareness of 'The Promise' and map next steps to support our care experienced learners and continue engagement with MCR Pathways Mentoring Programme for care experience learners.
- Implement improved use of data across ASN services including arrangements for tracking groups according to disability, protected characteristics and those who care experienced to be able to make meaningful comparisons.

[Highland Schools Digital Strategy 2023-26](#)

A recent report to members on the Highland Schools Digital Strategy included the aim is to support a culture of digital inclusion and innovation, leading to service

improvement through smarter ways of working and more effective use of digital tools. The strategy needs to consider national, local area priorities as well as digital inclusion. The Highland Council's digital learning provision, its Chromebook deployment, and the additional Connecting Scotland resources have helped to support equity of digital devices and connectivity. The Highland Council has been able to support and sustain digital learning across the Highlands, and ensure that for our young people, as far as is practicable, the impacts of location, rurality, poverty and other socio-economic factors, have been mitigated. The progress report highlights the following case study.

Case Study: Text Help's Read and Write software

As part of the Connecting Scotland grant, Highland Council invested in a 3-year licence for Text Help's Read and Write software. Every pupil and educator in Highland using a Google account has access to this tool. Read&Write is built around the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), meaning that it offers benefits to all students, allowing them to self-select the tools they need to support their own preferred style of learning.

Young People use the devices for:

- Speech Recognition
- Text to Speech
- Digital Answer Books to record their responses to questions
- Digital Question papers to magnify the text on screen.

Provision of Read&Write helps tackle inequality for students by ensuring all are provided the same opportunities and tools to directly assist with making reasonable adjustments to suit each individual student's education needs.

[Highland CLD Plan progress report](#)

The Highland Council (Education Authority) has the legal responsibility for Community Learning and Development (CLD) planning and delivery and for ensuring that this takes place within a Community Planning context. Progress has recently been reported on first year of the CLD plan, along with Highland Cares and My Future My Success (MFMS).

Of the five themes in the plan, there are three directly relevant to equality, diversity and inclusion - Mental Health and Wellbeing; Voice, Inclusion and Participation; and Digital Inclusion and actions are embedded throughout. Progress included examples of work across communities, such as

- A new LGBTQ+ Safe Space Club will provide a weekly drop-in session for LGBTQ+ young people aged 16-24 years to engage in arts-based well-being activities in a supportive and safe environment at Lyth Arts Centre.
- The Listening Ear Young People Social Anxiety Support Pilot to develop and run a programme of sessions to support young people who are impacted by social anxiety and isolation.

- Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH) Outreach Support. We will increase our offer of support for young people in Caithness aged 13+ to include an average of 3 hours of weekly group support and drop-ins.

Education and Learning UNCRC and Equality Forum

The Education and Learning Service UNCRC and Equality Forum has recently re-established with a wide group of education practitioners and partners to come together and share practice around things equality and children's rights. The aim of the forum is to engage with learning around equality-based practice and to feed into reports on work in supporting the UNCRC within Highland Schools. The work is being taken forward by secondment post is as Equality & Diversity Lead Officer with the Northern Alliance is a Regional Improvement Collaborative between eight local authorities working alongside Education Scotland's Northern Team of Attainment Advisors and Curriculum Specialists.

The Licensing Board and Equality

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

The Board is required to publish a statement of their policy before the end of the period of 18 months after an ordinary election of councillors for local government areas in respect of the exercise of their functions under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 during the next licensing policy period. The current policy statement will apply from 4 November 2018 to 3 November 2023. The Board had agreed a timetable for consulting on and approving the 2023-28 policy statement. This will come into effect from 4 November 2023.

In preparing their licensing policy statement, The Board must seek to promote the licensing objectives of: preventing crime and disorder; securing public safety; preventing public nuisance; protecting and improving public health; and protecting children and young people from harm.

Every three years, the Board is required to publish a policy statement of licensing principles they propose to apply in exercising their functions under the Gambling Act 2005. The current policy will apply from 31 January 2022 to 30 January 2025.

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

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

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

Licensing Board – Key actions:

An action was proposed in 2021 to involve Licensing Board members with the Highland Violence Against Women partnership training programme. Training with Board members was undertaken in February 2023.

Highland Council BSL Plan 2018-2024 update

Key priorities of the Highland Council's BSL Plan are the ongoing commitments BSL in Education delivered through the Deaf Education Services based in Dingwall Academy and meeting the needs of BSL users in Highland who need to communicate with either The Highland Council or NHS Highland services.

Deaf Education Service: For over 30 years, BSL has been part of the mainstream language options available in Dingwall Academy. It is available to both d/Deaf and hearing pupils. BSL is delivered by the Highland Deaf Education Service staff from S1 – S6. The Service has delivered Scotvec units, Signature qualifications SQA units and SQA National Awards in BSL at SCQF Levels 3, 4 & 5, and hope to deliver the new National Award in BSL at SCQF Level 6 from August 2023. As a measure of the success of the unit, six Dingwall Academy pupils have gone on to study BSL at Higher Education level.

The [1+2 Languages Initiative](#) in Scotland aims to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn a modern language. The Highland Deaf Education Unit developed a digital learning & teaching pack as part of the 1+2 languages initiative to encourage and support the learning and teaching of BSL as a mainstream language, without the need for a teacher to be a sign language user. This pack is freely available to all Highland staff, approximately 49 primary schools are currently signed up to use it, and a number of Highland secondary schools offer BSL taster courses using Highland's pack. Approximately 280 teachers in Highland have been trained to use the pack.

As a result of the pack, there are more people learning BSL in Highland than in any other region in Scotland. The pack is well regarded elsewhere and most other local authorities in Scotland have bought the pack; it has also been purchased South of the Border and the Welsh Government have expressed an interest in it.

BSL Interpretation: The Highland Council continues to deliver a Communication Support Service to provide BSL/English interpretation for anyone who needs to access the Council's services or NHS Highland services using an interpreter. The service is delivered using an in-house interpreter, supplemented by the services of a small, local bank of freelance interpreters when required, and a booking service operated by the Council's Service Centre team.

Although some BSL users still have a preference for a face-to-face interpreter, as a result of adjustments made during Covid there continues to be an increase in the number of appointments that now take place online using Teams or NearMe. We also continue to encourage BSL users to use Contact Scotland BSL to contact the Council. Throughout Covid, we worked proactively, including in partnership with NHS Highland to provide information to local Deaf/BSL users on COVID-19 vaccination and testing, including producing local BSL videoclips.

Other: The Council facilitated discussions with the Inverness Deaf Club and the voluntary sector in Inverness to find new premises for the club to meet after their

long-standing arrangement changed, and they are now meeting on a regular basis once again.

A Deaf Awareness module developed by is See Hear Highland Education & Learning Services (SHELLS) resources available on the Council's e-learning platform, and during 2023-2024 the People Development team will look at adding a DeafBlind module also developed by SHELLS and access to a British Sign Language (BSL) and Tactile BSL module.

The National BSL Plan is due to be reviewed in 2023, and local authority plans will require to be review their local plans by October 2024 and done so on consultation with BSL users in Highland.

Section 2 Equality Outcomes 2021-2025

2.1 Progress with Equality Outcomes during 2021-2023

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2021 – 2025

Progress during 2021-2023

1 Equality Outcome 1: A diverse workforce that reflects our community Lead Service: HR (People)

Progress - Priority activity 1: Council Workforce

- To better understand the demographic of our employees in relation to targeting opportunities to address underrepresentation of certain groups, in Spring 2023 the Council has updated its systems to gather equality data. This will allow improvements to data analysis and use for future mainstreaming reports. All staff survey in 2022 included equality monitoring.
- Improving equalities data monitoring & analysis to inform focused HR activity including the [Race, Employment and Skills inquiry](#) e.g.
 - To support this work, during 2023 the Council will engage with the CEMVO Race for Human Rights Programme which assists organisations in improving the ethnic diversity of their workforce as them as ‘critical friends’ in aspirations to embed human rights and race equality practices.
- Supporting a culture of inclusion at every level of the organisation
 - The Council is working towards achieving Level 3 as an employer (Leadership status) of the Disability Confident Programme by 2024, and has introduced a reasonable Adjustment passport in 2022.
 - Review and further development of Mentoring scheme – rollout planned for Autumn 21 aligned to revised Executive Performance Review, has been delayed until 2023.
- The Council has re-engaged with Close The Gap’s Equally Safe at Work accreditation programme and is due to complete in Dec 2023.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/80639/11_people_strategy

Progress - Priority activity 2: Employability

The Council and its partners via the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) continue the process of systemic change in line with the ‘No One Left Behind’ approach to create an all-age employability service to raise as many Highland residents as possible out of poverty, supporting those who face multiple barriers into employment and enabling progression out of poverty for those who are already in work.

The aim of the HEP is to work with individuals and employers to raise as many Highland residents as possible out of poverty through sustainable and fair work; supporting those who face multiple barriers into employment and enabling progression out of poverty for those who are already in work. During 2022/23, 680 clients were supported and 257 supported into employment.

Planned actions for 2023/23 that will impact on equality groups include:

- Allowances to support individuals to overcome barriers
- Allowances to support young people undertaking training for employment
- Allowances to support parents transitioning into work – support towards initial upfront costs and childcare
- Wraparound / flexible childcare pilots in North Highland, West Highland and Inner Moray Firth in identified communities lacking provision
- Specialist support commissioned from third or private sector providers to help clients who need more intensive support to progress towards and into work

www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/81479/item_8_employability_services

Progress - Priority Activity 3: Improving employment prospects of Resettled Syrian Families

This was dependent on AMIF funding which was not awarded.

Measures of Progress

- **Gender Pay Gap:** The gender pay gap for Council employees is 5% in 2020-21. Our **target** is to at least achieve the Scottish average.
 - *The Council's 2021/22 pay gap reduce to 4.5%. The national average is 3.5%. ✓*
- **Women in the top 5% of earners:** Women are 51% top 5% of earners in THC (2019-20). Our **target** is to at least achieve the Scottish average.
 - *Increased to 59% in THC during 2021/22. The national average is 59%.*
- **×Disability Confident:** Currently Level 2, our **target** is to achieve level 3 by 2024
- **ESAW:** aim to achieve Bronze accreditation by December 2023
- **Employability:** National Measurement Framework to be established

2

Equality Outcome 2: Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making.

Lead Service Communities and Place

Progress - Priority activity 1: Improved engagement and Involvement for people with protected characteristics

- Under the Engagement Framework, 10 Community Support Coordinators (CSCs) appointed in 2021 to undertake recovery, resilience and Community Development work across Highland. CSCs worked directly with community groups promoting inclusive approaches to engagement and activities.
- Learning from impacts of covid have also been applied to cost-of-living initiatives, encouraging engagement with harder to reach groups.
- Tackling inequality and disadvantage have been priorities for recent grant award programmes such as Cost-of-Living Fund, Community Regeneration Fund

Progress - Priority activity 2: Improved experiences for disabled people to access services

These actions have not progressed as planned. HighAbility is no longer active and the report following the Covid-19 survey with disabled people was not finalised. Understanding customer experience of engaging with Council Services is part of the My Council Programme going forward.

Progress - Priority activity 3: Improving the lives of Highland's Gypsy / Travellers

- Gypsy Travellers Improving Lives Delivery Group was established with representation from range of THC services, key partners and an organisation representing the GT community. Representatives are identifying possible contributing activities to a Highland Delivery Plan. Awareness raising training delivered and well received.
- Range of works to enhance each of the 4 sites identified by residents and delivered. Significant grant funding secured to deliver redevelopment of Longman Park - due to be completed in March 2025. Residents actively involved in planning activities and decision making.
- Negotiated Stopping approaches - awaiting output from pilots and national research

3

Equality Outcome 3: In Highland, people from identified groups feel respected and equally safe from harm, Lead Service Health & Social Care

Progress - Priority activity 1: Violence Against Women and Girls

- A refreshed set of priorities have been developed along with a Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) action plan for 2021-2024, using covid related data where available and partner information.
- Core training continues and details of courses are published on the [VAWP website](#) and new developments include the delivery of [Safe and Together](#) model training.
- Highland VAWP courses can be applied for on the TURAS platform (NHS) and there is online training available on TURAS.
- The VAWP delivered domestic abuse training to members of the Highland Licensing Board in early 2023.

Progress - Priority activity 2: Hate Crime and Hate Incidents

- Work with police and other partners to encourage the reporting of hate crime and to promote the Keep Safe campaign has been limited. It is intended that future partnership activity will be taken forward under the CPP Community Safety and Resilience group.
- The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill became law on 23 April 2021; the enforcement date is still to be confirmed and existing legislation applies until then. The Scottish Government published a new hate crime strategy in March 2023, which THC commented on via COSLA and suggestions to strengthen partnership working were adopted.

	<p>Progress - Priority activity 3: Reduce Prejudice based bullying in schools, Lead E&L</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next Lifestyle Survey updates available May 2023, and progress will be seen when the next set of data is available. • The Highland (UNCRC) Equalities Forum has been re-established which brings educational practitioners and partners together, this work will be guided by the Lifestyle results.
4	<p>Equality Outcome 4: With Partners in Highland, work to reduce socio-economic disadvantage for people from identified groups in the light of Covid-19 in line with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan Lead Service Communities and Place (for coordination)</p> <p>Progress - Priority activity 1: Income Maximisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Welfare Support Team has made continual improvements to promote Welfare support with our external partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working together in offering drop-in sessions, jobs fairs, employability, welfare services. ○ Additional work via presentations to various groups to promote the free & confidential welfare service available. ○ Analysis of customer needs, set and communicate clear service standards we provide. • Previously partnership working via Scottish Government improvement services have been extremely successful with the continuation of referrals to Welfare support team. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Other areas to explore are an online referral route for Highland council staff to refer themselves es/families to obtain information/benefit check - Target working people) ○ On-going Improvements to referral process with internal services e.g Housing, Social work, Schools. ○ better working practices for Social landlords - individual areas across Highlands don't always know what each other do therefore scope to promote our services. ○ Private landlords forums • More than 23,700 residents within Highland sought support from Council-funded welfare services during the financial year 2021/22. This generated in excess of 71,400 client contacts seeking advice on a variety of issues including COVID-19, welfare, money and housing • In Highland, financial gains derived for clients during 2021/22, by these Council-funded welfare services, exceeded £19.3m. • A joint Public Health, Welfare and Health Visitor project in 21/22, involving health visitors and the Welfare Team has nurtured a financial inclusion pathway across Highland with all Health Visitors and Family Nurse Partnership asking about financial matters at first point of contact. A referral pathway is now operating to enable Health Staff to refer to the Council's Welfare Team. The project was awarded a Scottish national financial inclusion award in 2021/22 for the collaborative approach, developed referral pathways and positive outcomes for family incomes.

Progress - Priority activity 2: Food Insecurity

- The Council's Community Support Co-ordinators have been working with groups across Highland to support the development of sustainable food tables and fridges.
- A partnership arrangement has been developed with Fareshare - a UK wide charity which accesses and redistributes surplus food – to ensure access for food tables and food fridges to access supplies.
- During 2021/22, the Council and FareShare distributed in excess of **195 tonnes** of quality food to the Highlands, which is estimated to be equivalent to over **464,000 meals** with an estimated value of around **£261,000**. The vast majority of food has been distributed across the network of community and faith groups which has been used to provide cooked meals and food supplies within local communities.
- Highland Third Sector Interface have developed, in collaboration with the Highland Good Food Partnership, a map to show food activity and community food provisions across Highland. The purpose of the Highland Food Activity Map is to help people find where they can buy and access food across the region. The map is for organisations within the Highland Council region who align with the [Highland Good Food Charter](#). The map includes:
 - food banks
 - local food producers
 - community fridges and larders
 - community cafés
- During winter 2022/23 the Cost of Living Support: Community Initiatives fund was delivered across Highland. The Fund was aimed at enabling local groups to respond to the needs of their local communities to support them through the cost of living crisis. The criteria was designed to allow the greatest flexibility for groups locally; to build and enhance local provision through extended hours or providing food but also to develop new provision if that was felt would work for their area. £450,000 was distributed supporting 106 projects across Highland

Progress - Priority activity 3: Child Poverty

Actions to address child poverty are set out in the partnership Integrated Children's Services Plan and Child Poverty action Report. A summary of the core themes including the some of the actions and latest updates are set out below:

- ***Reducing the poverty related attainment gap***
 - Each school has produced its own PEF (Pupil Equity Fund) plan to meet the needs of pupils in their school. This focuses on overcoming barriers to learning and closing knowledge and skills gaps. Plans are monitored annually and the impact reported through standards and monitoring reports and aligned to each school improvement plan.
 - Targeted Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding and Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) has been aligned with PEF plans to raise attainment and support vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people to achieve their potential. Support has taken time to impact and embed but progress is demonstrated through ACEL and SQA performance ([Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People](#)) At primary level, there was a 10% increase in attainment on literacy and 9% in numeracy during 2021-2022. The Digital Education & Learning Team have been supporting

schools to establish a digital educational approach across all stages of the curriculum. As far as practicable, the impacts of location, rurality, poverty and other socio-economic factors have been mitigated. Personalised learning digital tools have been rolled out which can contribute to closing equity gaps in education.

- **Improving opportunities for training and apprenticeships for parents and young people – detailed at equality outcome 1**
 - Roll out of parental employability support fund programme to work specifically with out of work and under employed parents
 - Development of young person guarantee work placement programme – in 21/22 147 young people supported into employment through the Highland Employment Recruitment Offer (HERO)
- **Addressing food insecurity by increasing equity of access to good quality food**
 - As detailed at priority two of this section
- **Reducing financial barriers for families**
 - Around 4,500 pupils in both primary and secondary school received means-tested free school meals and school clothing grants
 - Promoting access to concessionary leisure scheme through High Life highland – 9,200 households have access to the family budget card
 - Promoting and raising awareness of fuel discounts and grants – the welfare team have identified potential beneficiaries for energy and fuel advice. 1,896 families have been referred to the CAB run Energy Advice project.
 - During 2021/22 the Council supported households to benefit from a range of different Highland Council fuel discounts including Low Income and Energy Support payments - 17,405 households were supported over this period.
 - The Cost of the Day toolkit was piloted in a number of schools during 21/22 with a view to rolling out during 22/23.
- **Maximise uptake of child related social security benefits**
 - as detailed at priority one of this section
 - £2.8m Scottish Child Payment Bridging Payments were administered by the Council on behalf of the Scottish Government during 2021/22.
 - 724 senior phase pupils were awarded means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance of £30 per week during term time.

Highland Council Equality Outcomes 2021 – 2025

5 Equality Outcome 5: In Highland, people from identified groups, including young people, will have improved access to the resources needed to support their mental health and wellbeing.
Lead Communities and Place (for coordination)

Progress - Priority activity 1: Partnership activities

The partnership Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery group set a number of priorities for the related theme in the HOIP. The impact of the pandemic, and the current cost-of-living crisis, on mental health and wellbeing has been significant, and the priorities within the Delivery Plan remained relevant. However, some changes were made to the actions to ensure they were relevant. Activities include:

- survey young people in Highland to understand the impact that the pandemic has had on their mental health and wellbeing,
- develop a signposting resource for people seeking support with their mental health and wellbeing
- revision of mental health training and development of online and virtual training for mental health and suicide prevention
- develop a joint training plan for mental health and wellbeing
- review and develop resources and support, including training for community groups to increase confidence to support people with their mental health
- develop/promote resources and training on trauma and resilience
- seek feedback from Community partnerships on local issues that have arisen in relation to mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic
- Ensure links with the mental health and wellbeing outcomes in the Highland Integrated Children's Service Plan
 - Early Years, Childhood and Adolescence – a preventative approach - Positive work in schools includes - Promoting Positive Relationships Policy and Whole Schools Approach to MHW available to all schools. Community MHW preventative approaches supported through Highland Cares.

Progress - Priority activity 2: Mental Health and Wellbeing action plan

- The mental health and wellbeing of Council staff remains a priority and has informed the Council's approach to New Ways of Working, and to improving communication with staff.
- A new Occupational Health provider is due to start in May 2023

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20012/staff_information/1039/staff_news_-_october_2022/2

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/79133/14_corporate_health_safety_and_wellbeing_annual_report_202021_and_plan_202122

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/78410/10_staff_survey

Progress - Priority activity 3: Integrated Children's Services Plan - mental health and wellbeing

- There are training courses offered by Education Scotland and a number of internally delivered modules available to staff to increase skill and knowledge in the areas associated with building and maintaining good mental health and emotional wellbeing
- There is Improvement Action in E&L Service Plan for the development of the practice model for universal mental health approaches in Caithness be planned in other communities. Work is being undertaken with a number of schools and their pupils to create a self-evaluation tool and common survey using SHANARRI indicators. Each CPP area has a survey undertaken with YP to ascertain their views of MHW supports appropriate to their area.
- NHS Highland are leading on the Infant MH Strategy, however input is being provided by CEY Practitioners, Health Visitors and members of the EP team and PMHW service
- The E&L Service Plan includes an improvement action to work with head teachers to ensure there is equitable access to counselling for young people 12 year and above.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data on Counselling in schools is gathered quarterly and reported to SG. This shows an increase in the numbers of children accessing this service. 																												
6	<p>Equality Outcome 6: Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality through delivery of curriculum for excellence and wider school approaches following the principles of the Highland Practice Model and SHANNARI, Lead E&L</p> <p><i>Progress – Priority Activity: Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality and children’s rights</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> INCLUDE guidance has been shared with all Highland Schools The reconvened (March 2023) E&L Equalities and UNCRC Network will gather data from schools on the individual pupil lead equalities groups in schools The bi-ennial Lifestyle Survey asks pupils if they are aware that they have "a right to have a view and have this listened to". In 2021, 90% of pupils responding agreed with this statement. The next Lifestyle survey results are due May 2023. 																												
7	<p>Equality Outcome 7: Increase the number of young people with protected characteristics leaving school moving into positive and sustained destinations, Lead E&L</p> <p><i>Progress – Priority Activity: Reducing gender segregation and stereotyping within the curriculum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Scotland provide training on gender bias, gender segregation and stereotyping which is promoted across all Highland schools Next generation SEEMIS remains under construction. Likely to be 2024/25. This will enable the recording of sex at birth and gender separately. Highland participation for all 16-19-year-olds is higher than the Scottish average but lower than the national figure for the 20% most deprived young people. <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">Participation Measure - Snapshot December 2022 (most recent report)</th> </tr> <tr> <th>All 16-19 year olds</th> <th>Participating</th> <th>Not participating</th> <th>Unconfirmed</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Scotland - all</td> <td>90.5%</td> <td>4.7%</td> <td>4.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highland - all</td> <td>91.6%</td> <td>4.0%</td> <td>4.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <th>20% most deprived</th> <th>Participating</th> <th>Not participating</th> <th>Unconfirmed</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Scotland</td> <td>84.5%</td> <td>8.7%</td> <td>6.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highland</td> <td>85.0%</td> <td>9.4%</td> <td>5.7%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Participation Measure - Snapshot December 2022 (most recent report)				All 16-19 year olds	Participating	Not participating	Unconfirmed	Scotland - all	90.5%	4.7%	4.8%	Highland - all	91.6%	4.0%	4.5%	20% most deprived	Participating	Not participating	Unconfirmed	Scotland	84.5%	8.7%	6.8%	Highland	85.0%	9.4%	5.7%
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8	<p>Equality Outcome 8: Reduce attainment and achievement gaps between pupils with protected characteristics and also those living in poverty, Lead E&L</p> <p><i>Progress – Priority Activity: Reduce attainment and achievement gaps</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training on Differentiation has been made available to all schools in Highland to support classroom practice. Equalities training was offered to all head teachers during school session 2022-23. This is now a standard offer in the CLPL calendar, offered centrally to all staff. This aims to raise the understanding of staff about the specific 																												

presentations of some children with protected characteristics and their associated curricular needs.

- CLPL from Education Scotland Attainment Advisor and colleagues to support closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- 2022 primary phase ACEL data showed a reduced gap.
- Collaborative Improvement Framework developed and implementation underway. Attainment data is captured and analysed twice per year and followed up in HT meetings. Collaborative Lead Officers visit schools, discuss school, class and pupil-level attainment and progress with Headteachers. Data for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups is reviewed. Action plans developed as required, to improve attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap. CLPL signposted as necessary.

9 **Equality Outcome 9: We will meet the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning – reduce exclusions, improve the attainment of pupils looked after by the local authority, support for children from armed forces families, Lead E&L**

Progress – Priority Activity: Review of work for interrupted learners

- A document has been produced to support ELC with children from Armed Forces Families. This supports a previous document and training for staff on understanding the impact of cycles of separation when parents are away from home on training or active service.
- Training for staff on the affects of adverse childhood experiences and early trauma is available on the CPD calendar to support a greater understanding of the needs of children who are care experienced.
- Exclusion rates nationally are reported every 2 years. The most recent data shows a slowing of progress in Highland in relation to exclusion.

