

# Shetland's Local Annual Child Poverty Action Report, Year 6

## Reporting on 2023/24



## Foreword

We are pleased to share this report demonstrating a wide range of innovative and life-changing projects, interventions and interactions that our colleagues from across Shetland Islands Council, NHS Shetland and partner agencies have carried out across the last year to support children, young people and their families who live with poverty in our community. We hope this report showcases the breadth and depth of work going on as well as highlighting the power of working in partnership between organisations and listening to the views of families and individuals we work with.

We are constantly monitoring how our services plan and deliver this work in the community and the actions taken are key to how we can effect appropriate, meaningful and sustainable change for some of our most vulnerable families and fellow Shetlanders. All work showcased comes from trying to mitigate the effects of poverty and to improve the lives of families in a holistic way.

Despite the reported activity having a positive impact on children and families, child poverty is still increasing (both locally and nationally). Shetland may be the third lowest Local Authority in Scotland for children living in low income families (after East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire), however, the 2022/23 figure is higher than pre-pandemic levels and doesn't account for the higher cost of living in remote and rural Scotland.

As another winter approaches, we all start to think about the additional costs that living in Shetland brings; especially as the cost of living has been evidenced to be 20-65% higher than on the UK mainland.

The report comes at a time when public bodies are being asked to embed Childrens Rights, Keep The Promise and become more trauma informed. Much of this work touches on these national developments and cultural changes. We know that stigma and shame around poverty are real and a strong theme across many of the pieces of work has been opening access for all and destigmatising activity. Organisations and staff are striving to ensure our universal services are available to all while reaching those who require most support. We are seeing more partner work between organisations and more willingness to be creative and collaborative to solve problems. While we can rightly be proud of a lot of good work reaching the community we need to reflect on what is keeping statistics on the rise in terms of child poverty and continue to use data to identify greatest needs in the community.

The creation of this report has been a positive example of teamwork across services and we wish to thank all colleagues who have contributed to ensuring we could present such a rich and varied report. We would especially like to thank Lewie Peterson from Youth and Employability Service for pulling this together into such an accessible and informative read.

**Lesley Simpson**

**(Executive Manager for Inclusion - Shetland Islands Council, Childrens Services)**

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## Introduction

In Shetland, reducing child poverty and mitigating its impact can only happen through partnership approaches and in a way that reflects people’s circumstances and needs in the isles.

It is important that:

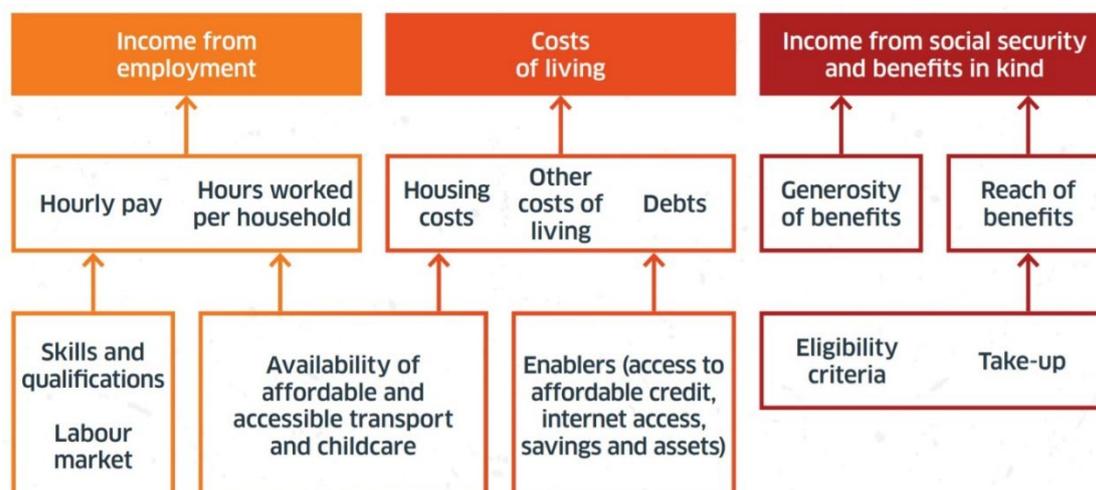
- we involve children, young people and their parents and wider families in shaping projects, products and services;
- we monitor impact, to inform future work – for example, recognising that failing is not a failure, as long as we fail quickly and learn from our experiences, and we learn from things that have gone well, sharing the learning into other areas of our work;
- All organisations and communities realise this issue is relevant to them all and that they each have a role to play in solving this issue.

### Drivers of Child Poverty

Evidence tells us that the three drivers of poverty are income from employment, cost of living, and income from social security and benefits in kind ([Best Start, Bright Futures, Scottish Government 2022-2026 Child Poverty Plan, 2022](#)). The Scottish Government state that impacting these drivers will impact levels of child poverty, and a focus on them is strongly encouraged.

In this report, we have highlighted which driver each activity aims to address. As stated in the [Local Child Poverty Action Report guidance](#), supporting families means taking a holistic approach; often activities carried out by partners and communities will influence more than one driver.

The below image portrays the drivers of child poverty (Best Start, Bright Futures, 2022).



## Approach on Reporting

The first section of this report introduces recent data on child poverty in Shetland and what we know.

The second and main part focusses on activity and impacts from 2023/24 by partners and communities. These are set out under three headings, as a series of updates and case studies. Mirroring Best Start Bright Futures (2022), we look at a wide range of examples of activity which contribute to:

- **providing the opportunities and integrated support parents need to enter, sustain and progress in work;**
- **maximising the support available for families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs;**
- **supporting the next generation to thrive.**



## Strategic Connections

This report has direct connections to the Shetland Partnership Annual Report 2023-24, the new Shetland Partnership Delivery Plan, and the Shetland Children's Partnership Plan (formerly the Integrated Children and Young People's Services Plan).

Many of the case studies in this report are featured in the Shetland Partnership Annual Report 2023-24 as they contribute to the Partnership Priorities as well as the drivers of child poverty.



We are continuing our approach developed across partners, for the planning and implementation of future actions to address Child Poverty across our communities:

- The strategic actions required to primarily mitigate the impact of Child Poverty are set out in both this report and in the Shetland's Children's Services Plan (23-26), Priority Area 3 – Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Children and Families;
- The strategic actions required to support structural change to reduce Child Poverty are set out in the Shetland Partnership Delivery Plan (i.e. this delivery plan has been developed through a lens of reducing Child Poverty).

The Work being done across the community also feeds into national priorities such as *The Promise* and UNCRC Incorporation. The Promise Scotland was established in March 2021 by Scottish Ministers following the Independent Care Review, which found that the current care system was not working. The Promise Scotland is built on five foundations: 'family', 'voice', 'care', 'people', and 'scaffolding'. The Promise Scotland aims to strengthen Scotland's care system to be more caring and collaborative. It focuses on relationships, rights, and participation.

Poverty affects the community's ability to fulfil The Promise as it impacts a family's ability to stay together. Once a child is in care, a family may find themselves in very challenging financial circumstances. In some cases, financial supports were almost immediately cut off at the point when a child was removed from the care of their birth parent.



Poverty-proofing For Families in or on the Edges of Care is based on research by OPFS with Child Poverty Action Group, and with The Promise Scotland providing advice and support.

It comes at a time when the cost-of-living crisis is acute for children and families, and the number of children and families interacting with the care system is expected to rise.

In the summer of 2024, the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child has been incorporated into Scots Law and therefore Public Bodies across Scotland will have to use their maximum resource to make sure rights are met. Poverty is one of the main barriers to a child having their rights met. Children have the right to have their family supported and to benefit from social security. They have a right to an adequate standard of living, including nutritious food and a safe warm home. They have rights to the highest attainable standard of health, to extra support if they are a young carer, or disabled, or care experienced – groups we know who are disproportionately impacted by poverty. They have the right to survive, grow and develop, and governments must do everything they can to prevent the deaths of children and young people. (<https://www.cypcs.org.uk/positions/child-poverty/>)



# What we know: Child Poverty in Shetland

## Poverty and Cost of Living Data for Shetland

Like Scotland, child poverty in Shetland has gradually increased since the early 2010s – although levels are consistently lower than Scotland as a whole, **12.3% of children were living in low income families in Shetland in 2022/23** (rise of 0.5% from previous year). Scotland’s level averages at 21.3%. While Shetland had the third lowest level of children living in low income families in Scotland in 2022/23, this is higher than pre-pandemic levels and increasing.



As mentioned in previous reports, these figures do not take into account the higher cost of living in remote and rural Scotland. Almost half of people in Shetland live in households with an income less than the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) benchmark. In working households, 42% of people in Shetland lived below the benchmark, compared to 29% across Scotland. This may mean that, even in households where adults are working and earning what would be considered a decent wage, financial hardship may be a risk or already being experienced.

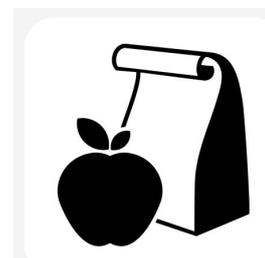
*“A minimum standard of living in the UK today includes, but is more than just, food, clothes and shelter. It is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society”.*



In recent years, we have been facing cost pressures across the UK, caused partly by energy costs and the war in Ukraine but also factors such as the cost of raw materials, supply chain issues and recruitment challenges caused by Brexit. This is likely to be exacerbated in Shetland where the cost of living is 20-65% higher than the UK mainland (Minimum Income Standard 2016).

Recent research by Hirsch (2023) highlights that due to the cost of fuel, food and other basic items rising faster than household incomes, there has been a reduction in living standards, felt by most people in the UK no matter what their income. Findings indicate that people near the middle of the income distribution are currently facing substantial risk of financial strain and material hardship. While this is not as high as people below the poverty line, it is far greater than for people towards the upper end of the income distribution. This means that those with incomes closer to the median level could be at substantial risk of financial strain, for example, the cost of living negatively impacting the ability to keep the house warm and the quality of food eaten.

In 2023-24, 562 pupils accessed Free School Meals (P6-S6) and accessed School Clothing Grants (Shetland Islands Council). This follows the alignment decision made by Shetland Islands Council on 22 February 2023 with regards to Free School Meals and Clothing Grants and to increase clothing grants by 50% in 2023-24. This decision was followed on 27 March 2024 when during an annual review of this arrangement, it was decided to continue this arrangement and to align free school milk eligibility to the above too.



Foodbank usage continues to increase in Shetland. An average of **137 food parcels were distributed per month** by the Shetland Foodbank in 2023-24, an increase of **3 parcels per month** on the previous year.

## Locality Profile Data

For a breakdown of where each area of Shetland sits in terms of some of these statistics, the Shetland Partnership has created Locality Profiles which can be found at the link below.

<https://www.shetlandpartnership.org/locality-profiles>

Please note the poverty and low income family data was captured in 2022 and that due to the small scale of population, there may be skewed results or trends at times, for example, if a family moves from one area to another.

Cost of Living impacts more on our rural communities and especially on Shetland's smaller islands communities.

Locality	Children in Poverty (2021-22) %	Cost of Living (% compared to Shetland average - 20-65% over UK average)	Participation Rate 2023 (% 16-19year olds in employment, training or work)	Out of Work Benefits 2021/22 (% claiming)	Median Income (2022) (% compared to Shetland average of £34,095))
Lerwick & Bressay	15.1	-13	96.9	12	-3.1
Central	12.9	-8	97.5	9.1	+13.2
North	10.7	+8	98.9	8.3	-6.6
South	10.7	-8	95.5	8.8	+23.4
West	11.4	+8	97.9	6.4	-1.9
Whalsay & Skerries	9.2	+13	100	3.1	-22.2
Yell, Unst & Fetlar	9.1	+13	100	9.6	-25.7
Shetland	11.6		97.4	8.8	

(Individual ward details have not yet been published for 2022-23)

The [Child Poverty Action Group](#) highlight that poverty rarely has a single cause and that in the recent past, child poverty levels in the UK have been significantly lower than they are today. A range of factors including: rising living costs, low pay, lack of work and inadequate social security benefits together, mean that some people do not have enough resources.

## What we have done (2023/24)

In 2023, the attached plan for 2023 and beyond was created with priorities around mitigating the impacts of poverty on families. These were:



- **Normalising family support, and ensuring child and family centred approaches, across all of our supports;**

- **Increasing the income to our families.**



Throughout Shetland, work being carried out is informed by data, user experience and strengthened by collaboration, with any learning used to inform future plans and methodology.

The planning and delivery of actions in order to address structural changes required to reduce Child Poverty, are set out in the Delivery Plan for Shetland's Partnership Plan, 2023-2028

[www.shetlandpartnership.org/downloads/file/73/shetland-partnership-delivery-plan-2023-2028](http://www.shetlandpartnership.org/downloads/file/73/shetland-partnership-delivery-plan-2023-2028)

This section of the report focuses on the rationale, activity, impact and learning from 2023/24. Activities and case studies by SIC, NHS and partners, which contribute to the drivers of child poverty highlighted will be grouped into three main sections – each one reflected by the drivers below:

- **'Providing the opportunities and integrated support parents need to enter, sustain and progress in work';**
- **Maximising the support available for families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs;**
- **Supporting the next generation to thrive.**

### Providing the opportunities and integrated support parents need to enter, sustain and progress in work

Work offers a sustainable route out of poverty for many families and has a strong role to play in a balanced approach to tackling poverty (Best Start, Bright Futures, 2022). The Scottish Government outline that for this to be possible, a wide range of systems need to align. This includes a strong labour market with fair and flexible employment; along with availability of affordable and accessible transport and childcare; skills and qualifications; and fair hourly pay for instance. Over the past year, there have been examples of local collaborative working to support parents into employment, increase childcare availability, and support businesses and fair work in the island's economy

## **‘Thank Goodness It’s Thursday’ (TGIT) – Employability Parent/Toddler Group** Shetland Islands Council, Employability Pathway

The TGIT Group aims to widen family access to social & emotional support and employability services. It was previously named *‘the Young Mum’s Group’* and takes the form of a Parent/Toddler format with weekly sessions at Sandveien Neighbourhood Centre. It is run independently as a fully constituted group with parents as office bearers supported by Employability Pathway staff and Anchor support services so that while parents attend, they can receive support in a number of ways and without fear of shame/stigma. The group is partly funded through *No One Left Behind* Government funding (allocated by the Shetland Local Employability Partnership).

Support can come in the form of:

- **Employability support (job search, completing job applications, accessing training courses etc.)**
- **Advice on financial matters and benefits**
- **Health and Nutrition workshops**
- **Information Sessions from UHI Shetland to give advice on opportunities available**
- **Play/arts and crafts sessions organised to promote attachment between parents and children, and to provide positive learning experiences for parent and child to share together**
- **Workshops on increased confidence and motivation**
- **Support with School liaison.**



The group is now run jointly by Anchor and Employability Pathway meaning access to support in a number of ways has been increased. By building a relationship with families, support workers have been able to find out how to support them best. Last year, 25 parents accessed the group. Over half of these then accessed other means of support due to attending. There is regular collaboration with Shetland Family Centre, Children & Families Social Work, Health Visitors, local Primary Schools, Shetland UHI, Adult Learning and NHS where families are signposted to their services or organisations are often invited to the session to give information and engage with participants.

The facilitating partners regularly speak with the families who use the group. Parents hold office-bearing positions so that they can shape the direction of how it works. Consistent attendances are a testament to the relationships built.

In the last year, out of the 25 parents attending the group:

- **13 have had emotional/social support, employability support, attended day trips, training courses, events, received financial support, sign-posting to other services;**
- **24 Parents have received direct support/interacted with Shetland Employability Pathway;**
- **10 have with varying levels of support, started work since commencement of this support;**
- **6 continue to work, having received in work support;**
- **5 have benefited from support (emotional/social) without significant outcomes (economic/education) i.e. they are economically inactive;**

- **15 parents have attended Best of You parenting programme;**
- **6 completed Henry Healthy Start course (Nurture course by NHS/Family Centre).**

The impact on families has only been made possible through relationships being built in the TGIT group. Having the group joint led by Anchor and Employability Services has made it more manageable and created a higher quality offer that parents want to attend. For some, this is all they require but for others it is a gateway to receiving additional support through Anchor or Employability services.

While the group is open to all parents, the vast majority are mothers. An alternative group aimed at fathers will be developed during 24/25 in Shetland in a similar format with both receiving a targeted offer (referrals only) and a universal offer.

### **Rural Outreach through ‘Employability Roadshow’** Shetland Islands Council –Employability Pathway

Shetland Islands Council’s Youth and Employability Team are based in Lerwick and through the Employability Pathway, offer person-centred support to residents aged 15 up to retirement. Help is available for anyone looking for work, including assistance with job applications, CVs or improving interview skills. They offer access to free training courses and social groups as well as support for anyone already in work looking to progress.

In order to reach individuals for whom transport and their rural location are barriers to this support, the team organised a community roadshow. With around two thirds of participants that the service worked with based in or near Lerwick, and the service being online during the covid-19 pandemic, it was felt important to ensure the service was reaching everyone who needs it, by taking the service out to communities. This is in alignment with the Employability Shared Measurement Framework and the No One Left Behind approach. Other aims were to combat the stigma of accessing support, as well as the service fatigue of those that may have sought support and were not receiving what they felt they needed. It was also useful for staff who had joined the service during the pandemic when everything was online, to meet people in the community face to face.

The roadshow involved taking the service out to different areas in Shetland; 20 locations were visited. Each quarter of the year, a week was spent taking the service to different communities. Staff were on hand with hot drinks and biscuits, ready to help anyone who needed it. Childcare and transport were also available. The team offered an open door and a warm space, Wi-Fi where possible, a gateway to the Council and other services as well as a listening ear over a cup of tea.



The Youth and Employability team worked in partnership with the Council’s Community Learning and Development, Transport and Communications teams alongside Shetland Recreational Trust (SRT) and private local providers. SRT’s leisure centres were used for many of the events. Partnership working was important, as staff were able to suggest times when their venues were likely to have greater footfall, such as when swimming lessons were on. This meant that childcare was already available and parents could visit. The roadshow was slightly adapted each time, for example, it reduced to more specific timings and childcare was added as the year went on.

The team spoke to twelve people, and three registered onto the Employability Pathway. While this is a lower rate of people signing up than normally expected, the service has seen an increase in referrals alongside a greater use of the service through their drop in sessions. It typically takes 12-18 months to support a person into employment, so the impact to those who signed up is likely to be seen later. Some who visited the roadshows were helped in ways unrelated to employment, a positive consequence of a *No Wrong Door* approach. One person was signposted to a charity which helped them with an issue they had; and one individual is now attending the Living Well Hubs. One individual was referred to Citizens Advice Bureau for financial support, and another to relationship counselling support. The team also put funds back into the local economy by using local vehicle hire and catering companies.

The team reflected that, attendance will vary at these events. Sometimes there are not enough people who require the support in an area, sometimes there is still a perceived stigma, or people are not able to attend. However, the team feel that it is important to keep trying. The team have ideas about how to run it again, as well as plans to carry out further engagement with employers.

### **Increasing Access and Flexibility in Early Learning & Childcare** (Shetland Islands Council, Early Learning and Childcare)

Since August 2020 every three and four year old, (and some two year olds) in Shetland have been eligible for up to 1140 hours per year of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC). Being part of a high quality ELC setting can help children to learn and develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed in all areas of their lives. It also removes one of the main barriers to employment for individuals with dependents.

Responding to feedback from local communities, the ELC central team have taken steps to widen access to childcare for parents and carers in order to support them into employment while giving their children high quality childcare experiences. Two examples of this in 2023/24 have been –

- **Expanding the out-of-school provision** in South Mainland (Sandwick Junior High) to include additional days and to be open for more weeks over school holiday periods. The out of school provision is also offered to other communities in the South Mainland.
- **Giving parents and carers the option to pay for additional hours** for their child's placement at their ELC setting over the 30 funded hours per week threshold. This has been introduced in five settings so far.

By increasing Sandwick's out of school provision, there has been an increase in uptake thus demonstrating that there is a demand for this approach.

Staff have heard from parents and carers that they are able to work additional hours now that they are confident this provision is in place consistently. For some, it has been the main factor in being able to increase their hours of employment.

One of the aims of expanding out of school provision and offering additional hours in early learning and childcare was to increase uptake and flexibility of childcare in the community. While this has supported parents and carers with increasing or improving working hours, it has also provided a consistent and quality childcare experience for young people.

The Early Learning and Childcare central team are continuing to work with other ELC settings with the aim to support childcare needs through offering additional hours where there may be a demand.

Shetland Islands Council will be part of a project in 2024/2025 known as the Early Adopter Community Project. This project aims to develop and test a community-based system of childcare that supports families most at risk of living in poverty, from early years to the end of primary school in the North Isles and West Mainland communities. Some of this work will also take place in already established settings across Shetland. A person-centred approach will be undertaken through co-design and engagement with children, families, and childcare providers to understand the childcare needs within these communities.

### **Increasing Adult Skills – ‘Multiply’:** Shetland Islands Council, Adult Learning Team

‘Multiply’ is a project run by Shetland Islands Council’s Adult Learning Team to make creative and practical use of government money dedicated to improving any individual’s numeracy skills. The Adult Learning Team worked with many partner organisations and services to deliver this project, including Community Work, Food for the Way, the Methodist Church, Hymhus and The Recovery Hub, and SIC Schools.



This project is aimed to target challenges such as the ability to understand and use maths in everyday life, household poverty and lack of confidence in both work and personal environments. To identify the main issues, the Adult Learning Team visited workplaces and also offered pop-ups and drop-ins in community settings such as a local shopping centre, community centre and established groups. In the workplace, the main issues identified were inability to accurately use cash registers or handle money, difficulties understanding pensions and tax and completing timesheets. Individuals and families struggled with household budgeting, helping their children with homework and being able to accurately measure.

To try to overcome these issues, Adult Learning offered a range of classes including:

- **Fun with Numbers,**
- **Workplace Numbers**
- **Cooking on a Budget**

Further to this by offering pop-ups at community organisation venues like Hymhus that the target audience already frequent, they were able to identify and help more families and individuals directly.

Through direct feedback, group discussions and evaluation forms, the Adult Learning Team were able to identify many positive results. By taking the time to explain how maths is taught in schools, many parents are now able to better support their children with their homework. Working with individuals on a one to one basis has enabled people to build confidence in being able to use items such as tape measures in their homes to purchase essential household items, such as cookers and curtains to increase their quality of life. In workplaces, employees have gained confidence working with money and cash registers, and understanding numeracy in a work environment. This resulted in a more reliable and confident workforce. Many of the courses offered also help with effective budgeting and managing money.

The pop-ups allowed for the target audience to participate in planning how best to help them. An improved quality of life allows people to thrive and reach their full potential. The courses offered and support available for families help make Shetland an attractive place to study and live. Many of

these activities have resulted in individuals learning how to budget better, leading to households being better able to afford a good standard of living.

## Maximising the support available for families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs

### Cost of Living Campaign and Support (Update from 23/24)

In 2023, Shetland Islands Council received £222,000 funding from the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund for the second consecutive year. The fund was started in 2022 by the Scottish Government provide financial support to the country's six island councils to help their communities, due to the higher cost of living in the islands as opposed to the mainland. The money is distributed to the island authorities based on population, with the goal of helping to fight poverty. The focus is on community need and working in partnership with community groups and organisations.

Shetland Islands Council used its funding in 23/24 in the following ways:

- Scheme to provide local households on Council Tax reduction with extra income (this meant **1066 households were paid £150.00 into their Council Tax accounts**).
- Providing 21,034 **free breakfasts for secondary school pupils** – school staff observed more positive behaviours in mornings, calmer pupils and more focused learning for some. It also provided food and hot drinks at the Youth Hub in Lerwick which were used by 140 young people through the year using the Hub as a safe space to 'hang out'.
- Running 98 Community 'Pop-Ins' in 23 different venues across Shetland. These sessions were a social and welcoming space for people to access support informally. They were designed to be family friendly with hot food, activities for children, and input from over 48 partners. Overall 950 people attended a session throughout 23/24 with ages ranging between 6 months and 96.
- Refreshing the social media campaign, We Shine Brighter (a campaign designed to encourage those in need of support to seek it and to destigmatise the effects of poverty). This campaign reached over 100,000 people on social media and the accompanying film was viewed over 13,000 times.
- Maintaining a Cost of Living free phone helpline for local families (run by Community Development, Anchor for Families and Children & Families Social Work teams).



- Supported further roll out of Money Worries training and Adult Learning’s Cooking on a Budget classes. Some funding was also allocated to Social Enterprise, Transition Turriefield (community growing project based on the far West-mainland of Shetland) to supply fresh produce for classes and to hold pop-ins for families encouraging people to grow their own food.

**Kit For All – Removing Barriers to Physical and Social Activity**  
Shetland Islands Council, Sport and Leisure



The Kit for All programme aims to remove barriers and increase accessibility to physical activity for all ages in Shetland by facilitating donation and collection of sports and outdoor wear to those who feel they need it. The initiative is open to anyone in Shetland and entirely voluntary but promoted through partners and front-line services (Schools /Social work for example) in order to best meet people’s needs.

The project has been rolled out nationally but originated in Shetland when it was observed that some young people were not taking up sports and recreational activities they had previously shown an interest in due to lack of appropriate sports clothing or fear of embarrassment at what they might wear to an activity.

While the original focus was on young people and families, the project now works with all ages in the community.

In the last year, the focus has been on reaching out to rural communities across Shetland, partnering with community groups, local events and Shetland Islands Council’s Living Well Hubs with the aim of increasing reach and use of the sports and outdoor wear collection. This can help remove stigma of the use of the donated items and gives an opportunity for listening to individuals and family’s needs to better understand how to remove barriers to sport and leisure in the future.



This has been built on a partnership approach between Sports & Leisure staff and a network of frontline services (teachers, social work, employability staff) as well as community development staff and local organisations/events such as Ability Shetland, the Sandwick Family Fun Day and North Mainland’s ‘Bruckland’. All these partners support signposting, reach and promotion of both donation and collection of goods and also support individuals make their barriers to taking part in an activity known in a sensitive and discreet way.

There has also been a focus on footwear this year with a larger campaign around football and rugby boots (two of the most popular and widely played sports in the isles).



In the last year, over 400 individuals have collected some sort of sports or outdoor wear, often on behalf of family members. In order to increase uptake, the collections are often discreet and anonymous therefore measuring the impact after the goods are distributed is not easy. However frontline services have given feedback below.

*“We are seeing children now able to play for their football club. I have one lady who I passed on a winter jacket and a pair of walking shoes to. She has been able to go for walks - this would have been previously inaccessible for her.”*

Due to local demand, the project has expanded to having donation and collection points throughout Shetland and a storage unit to keep much of the donated stock and distribute when appropriate. The focus this last year has been on reaching local areas and individuals in more rural areas as well as collection and donation of old football and rugby footwear. This arose due to comments from families regarding their children wanting to try these sports and being put off by the cost of boots.

Staff have observed a large and quick turnover of the boot collection scheme which shows that high numbers are both donating and collecting items. This may be due to overall increase in the Cost of Living in Shetland for more people but also an increase in awareness of the positive impact on the environment and sustainability by such actions.

There has been feedback from schools saying that this scheme has made the difference between some children taking part in PE classes or sports competitions and not participating. There are also examples of younger children trying sports for first time (especially girls).

*“Families we work with - especially the children - don't feel excluded and are able to access PE, swimming and have good trainers for day to day use.”*

The Scheme will continue to partner with organisations and rural communities as it has done in the last year. It is hoped to expand this to more localities more regularly, for example in the South Mainland, and to include pop-up sessions in school holidays when more parents can access them. A lot of the promotion has involved local and social media as well as partnership dialogue and word-of-mouth therefore the reach of the project should hopefully grow and develop according to local needs.

## **Living Well Hub – Reaching Between Services** Shetland Islands Council, Adult Social Work

The Living Well Hubs in Shetland are an early intervention approach aiming to empower individuals in the community by connecting them with local community organisations or voluntary groups, as well as referring to other support services including Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland. It aims to make people healthier, happier and more connected by removing barriers to support while combating the isolation and loneliness many individuals feel.



The Hubs take the form of a drop-in service for anyone who needs to find out more about local health and social care support options. The staff ethos is having ‘positive conversations’ with people who come in and talking about what they really want in life.

It is part of the roll out of the Community Led Support (CLS) programme in Scotland, aiming to link communities with health and social care services in a way that people might find easier to access. There are currently three hubs in Shetland: Brae, Scalloway and the most recent in Bressay, opening in 2023.

From April 2023, the Living Well Hub in Brae expanded incentivised its reach. Hub staff started facilitating a Community Cupboard at the Brae Youth Centre to support families and households struggling with the Cost of Living crisis. The Cupboard provides a discreet, secure and central

location in the North Mainland of Shetland for local people to donate and collect items such as store cupboard ingredients and clothing. By hosting the Cupboard, it can increase engagement between individuals in need and the Hub through signposting to other forms of support such as recreational groups, benefit checks, mental health support and hobbies/interests.

The Cupboard was originally conceived by pupils at Brae High School, then designed by participants of the Bridges Project, with the support of UHI Shetland's Construction Department, to create something to fit the space at Brae Youth Centre. It is a satellite resource to the St Ringan's Hub in Lerwick. <https://www.shetland.gov.uk/news/article/2409/st-ringans-hub-opens-for-cost-of-living-support>

Eleven participants took part in creating the Cupboard, working on everything from design, construction and finishing. Volunteers from local haulage company RS Henderson Ltd transported the Cupboard to its final location in Brae.

Staff have observed the Cupboard being used by a range of people in the community from young families to single/retired people. Due to the discreet/confidential nature of use, there are no official recorded numbers however staff observed examples of people using the Cupboard and then realising the other support that could be advised/offered from the Living Hub staff. This has led to weekly Social groups being formed including a Bereavement Support group (which came about as a result of community requests to the Hub).

In 2023 Hub staff have had **608 contacts from individuals throughout Shetland** (in person and through email) - an increase from 200 two years ago. Word-of-Mouth promotion in the community is seen as being the main driver for this as well as more people being concerned about members of their family in matters of health, care or finance.

The ethos of 'positive conversations' and partnership approaches mean more people are being able to get the support they require using the Hub model. While some are referred to higher tier services such as Social Work or NHS, most of them are finding what they need through existing resources and low-level actions. This not only helps support individuals but also takes the strain from higher level intervention services.

*"I cannot overstate the effect that these suggestions, contacts and meetings have had on the quality of my life. They illustrated a potential future for me when I thought none existed, and I now have a small network of people in my life to help keep the Black Dog at bay."* (Hub user)

*"Having the Hub, and the ever-helpful staff there, makes dealing with benefits, social care, psychological, or other agencies so easy"* (Hub user)

By reaching out to different localities and partners, staff have learned that every community has its own profile, needs and ambitions. They are looking at how to extend the ethos of the Hub model to North Isles as well as West Mainland and South Mainland of Shetland.

## Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) – Local Impact

Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau is a local, independent charity, which provides free, impartial and confidential advice and information to give individuals or families the tools they need to sort out any issues or problems with:



- Benefits
- Energy
- Debt and Money
- Housing
- Employment
- Legal
- Relationships
- NHS Concerns or Complaints
- Health and Community Care
- Consumer
- Immigration

In their most recent report (for financial year 23/24), they report having helped **1579 individual clients (636 of whom were new to the service)**. They had **8707 contacts with clients providing advice on 7490 issues**.

The three biggest topics which people have sought advice on have been:

- Benefits (53% of issues reported)
- Utilities and Communication (18%)
- Debt/Financial Services/Tax (11%)

**£** **£1,708,207**  
gained for  
clients

The impact the organisation has been able to have has been significant with **£1,708,207 gained for clients including £1,422,825 through successful benefit claims, appeals and back-payments**.

They have helped **58 clients with complex debt issues** and helped **53 clients write off a total of £170,610**.

The Case Study below illustrates their impact on families through maximising social security income and providing compassionate and independent support and guidance.

Client is a single parent who lives with her teenage daughter. The client could not afford to pay her energy arrears arising from a previous property of £800, and was struggling to pay the ongoing energy costs in her new property, which has a pre-payment meter. The client was anxious about her situation. Her and her daughter's health conditions meant that they were housebound for much of the time, and needed a warm environment so that their symptoms were not exacerbated. As she was too ill to work, she could not afford to pay either the arrears or her ongoing energy costs. CAB helped the client apply to Home Heating Advice Scotland to access funds to pay off the arrears in their entirety. This prevented the debt from being added to her new pre-payment meter and causing more financial hardship. Home Heating Advice Scotland also provided a credit of £150 to help towards future energy costs.

In addition, CAB helped the client apply to the Fuel Bank Foundation for a £31 voucher for future energy costs.

As both the client and her daughter were disabled, CAB helped the client register with the Priority Service Register. This service provides extra help to vulnerable customers in the event of a power cut.

CAB checked the client's benefits to make sure that she was maximising her income. The client was already receiving Universal Credit with the carer's element for looking after her daughter, but had not applied for Carer's Allowance. This would entitle her to the additional Scottish Carer's Supplement (£288.60, paid twice per year). An adviser helped the client to obtain this.

CAB helped her report her health condition to the DWP via her Universal Credit Journal so that she could have a Work Capability Assessment. CAB's welfare rights adviser helped her complete the "Capability for Work" questionnaire. Depending on the outcome of this assessment, the client may have a further sum added to her Universal Credit award.

CAB helped the client apply for a Council Tax Reduction. They also helped her apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment from the Council, to fill the deficit caused by the "bedroom tax". CAB advised her to start a claim for Adult Disability Payment, which is a non-means tested benefit for people with long-term illnesses or disabilities. CAB's welfare rights adviser supported the client to make this claim.

Finally, they also checked the daughter's entitlement to benefits, and supported her with applications for Universal Credit, a Work Capability Assessment and Adult Disability Payment. As a result of their help, the client's fuel debt has been written off, she has credit on her meter to keep the house warm and both she and her daughter have maximised their income so that they are more financially secure.

## **Cash First Intervention and Debt Reduction for Social Housing Tenants** (Hjaltland Housing Association)

In 2023, Hjaltland Housing Association (HHA) carried out a project to alleviate and reduce child poverty. This project aimed to tackle challenges faced by tenants around social exclusion through being in poverty, and the impact of not being able to heat your home on family. There was also a specific focus on the cost of living stressors.

Social housing can help to alleviate child poverty, through affordable accommodation for tenants. It is understood that families in social housing typically face additional pressures. Previously HHA handed out guidance and sources of help to tenants, through a scheme to support those struggling with their energy bills and living costs. Surveys from this and previous schemes flagged financial support as being important in addressing these challenges. HHA brought the idea for this project to their Tenant Focus group to help understand their thoughts and position on what was planned.

For this project HHA delivered support in two ways, through:

- **A Cash first intervention**
- **Funding to reduce debt**



The Cash First Intervention involved one-off payments to tenants, with £200 for single persons and couples, and £300 for families and households with children in. These payments were made directly and the households chose how to spend it. The Funding to Reduce Debt involved up to £500 being given to tenants / households to address debt accrued against an energy supplier. This was provided where there was evidence of debt; some debt was paid off directly to the energy supplier, and in some cases it was paid through to the tenant.

The interventions through this project were aimed at those at risk of, or in, poverty, and families. Identification of Households / Tenants to be supported was made through various means; including surveys from annual reports (that included questions around cost of living, fuel poverty, extreme fuel poverty), those previously sign-posted to other services, and home visits (through Technical Officers and the Financial Inclusion Officer). HHA worked with Shetland Citizens Advice Bureau for some elements of the project. Funding came from the Scottish Government Fuel Insecurity Fund; primarily targeted at alleviating fuel poverty, different streams within the fund allowed for this project to offer additional support to those with children.

In total 146 payments were made as part of the Cash First Intervention, and 22 payments were made through the Funding to reduce debt. This amounted to around £45,000 spent in 3½ - 4 months, directly supporting individuals and families.

All recipients were surveyed; 81 households noted improvement in their ability to control/maintain heat in the home, 72 households noted improvement in reduction in depression / anxiety, 44 noted relief from debt and 23 noted health improvements. Comments from recipients included:

*“The £300 funding has been a massive help and relief. As a single mother I do struggle being able to pay my bills fully, especially in winter. I really appreciate the funding and I’m hugely grateful.”*

*“It’s hard being a single parent of three children. I never have enough money and I always feel like I am failing my children, which realistically I know I’m not, but sometimes I truly feel I am. To have a huge amount of money on my meter, and a massive amount of debt I owed paid off, was truly wonderful. I did in fact cry twice. I don’t think you know how much it meant to me, so a massive thank you from me and my bairns, it was truly appreciated.”*

This project has helped to give a broader awareness that there are a lot of families struggling, and that they find it hard to ask for help. Knowing that support is there is key, making the relationships built up with tenants through this project even more important; tenants are more likely to seek support in the future due to this. The project was also beneficial due to how quickly the money was distributed once approved.

This project relates to the child poverty drivers ‘Cost of living’ and ‘income from social security and benefits in kind’; with links to ensuring families can lead dignified lives/meet basic needs, and supporting the next generation to thrive.

## **Extending Scheme for Free School Meals and School Clothing Grants** Shetland Islands Council, Childrens Services Finance Team

In 2023, many families in Shetland (who didn’t meet national Free School Meal or School Clothing criteria) were being disadvantaged due to the proportional higher costs of living in the isles. At the start of 2023, free school meals were available to:

- Children at stages Primary 1-5

- Children from families within the national threshold (in receipt of child tax credit with an earned annual income of less than £17,005 or child tax credit and working tax credit with an earned annual income of less than £7,920 or in receipt of Universal Credit with a monthly earned take home pay of less than £660 per month.)

Shetland families were also supported through School Clothing Grant payments (Primary £120/Secondary £150). To receive this, parents had to be in receipt of child tax credit / working tax credit with an annual earned income of less than £17,005 or be in receipt of the Housing Element of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction.)

Shetland Islands Council made the decision to **align Free School Meal criteria into School Clothing Grant scheme (in order to increase the number of families being supported)** as well as **increasing the payments for School Clothing Grants by 50%** to help deal with the additional cost of living in Shetland for those already supported. This meant that the scheme could take into account the regional variation in cost of living.

In 2023, average household energy bills in Shetland were double the UK average meaning that an average annual household energy cost could be £10,300 by April 2023. A Shetland household would need to earn over £104,000 not to be in fuel poverty, meaning 96% households were in fuel poverty and 75% in extreme fuel poverty. Data from the Remote Rural Income Standard demonstrated that the cost of living in Shetland is 20-60% higher than the UK average. Shetland's cooler climate, poor insulation levels and lack of availability of the cheapest energy options further compound the effect on our communities.

Delivering the scheme has allowed more children, parents and families to access free school meals and have more income and less outgoings as a result of the increase in Clothing Grants. Due to the roll out of ParentPay (online portal for school meal payments) and usage of Young Scot/National Entitlement Cards in many schools, it also means pupils receive the benefits of this scheme anonymously and without stigma.

An additional **155 pupils in P6-S6 received Free School Meals** since the changes were made.

The School Clothing Grant increase also affected **562 pupils who received extra income for their households at a crucial time**. While families had to apply for this support, Childrens Services Finance promoted it directly via schools and Early Learning & Childcare settings (as well as wider public communications) and also collaborated with Anchor Support services and Social Work for families who required additional help in applying. Parents were also able to come along and receive direct support in applying from Children's Services Finance Team.

A survey of affected families who have benefitted from the changes in School Meals and Clothing Grant policies reveals three out of five respondents felt they would struggle financially if they were no longer entitled to access Free School Meals.

*"Without it I really don't know where I would find the money to pay for my son's meals. This would be detrimental to my stress and mental health."*

*"Without it we would have to make cutbacks at home with shopping or electricity to make sure that school meals are paid."*

*"Takes the pressure off heating the house and clothing your child properly."*

The scheme was originally trialled for one year but has now been extended and will be an ongoing policy with annual reviews. Not only this but in 2024 this has been extended to cover free breakfast

provision in all secondary schools as well as Free School Meal Holiday Support extended to ELC settings (including eligible 2 year olds). These changes were as a result of piloting some work and surveying parents and staff in schools as part of the process.

As part of this consultation, there have been discussions about an 'opt out' option rather than application process for Clothing Grants to make sure everyone eligible receives the extra income.

There are also plans to examine whether there are more gaps between those in need and the eligibility criteria to inform future provision.

## **Shetland Rural Retail Services Scheme – Supporting Sustainability of Local Shops**

Shetland Islands Council, Economic Development Service



The current operating environment for Shetland's rural shops is very challenging, in part driven by inflation and the increased costs of stock, transportation and non-domestic electricity. Rural shops form a vital part of their communities and recent events, such as Covid restrictions and severe weather events, have further demonstrated this crucial role, especially for those who are more vulnerable.

The cost of owning and fuelling a vehicle is something people are increasingly unable to afford, public transport in rural areas can be infrequent and also inaccessible/not appropriate for some. Having local rural shops removes the need to travel long distances to purchase everyday staples, and the expense of traveling these distances.

Following feedback from local shops, SIC community workers, councillors and other local agencies about the challenging conditions these rural shops were experiencing, and the impact this was having on their sustainability, the Economic Development Service:

- **Launched a Rural Retail Services Scheme, offering grant support for capital improvements to shop premises;**
- **Created an information leaflet for rural shops, outlining a range of support available to them both locally and nationally.**

The aim of which was to support rural shops to reduce costs, increase sustainability, remain viable, and continue to support local rural communities.

The Rural Retail Services Scheme (RRSS) was established to support and incentivise businesses to adapt to new ways of working or make investment to remain competitive. The purpose of the Scheme was to make available grant funding to improve the facilities and amenities of local shops in order to improve their sustainability and ensure they continue to provide a vital local retail service to their community. The Scheme was financed from funds made available through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Scheme offered grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 for eligible businesses to invest in adaptations, improvements and new ways of working e.g. energy efficiency, investment in green technology to reduce costs, new systems, etc.

As well as the maximum grant of £10,000 there were intervention rates, based on a percentage of eligible project costs and determined by location.

An Information leaflet was released a few months after the RRSS was launched. The purpose of the leaflet was to make rural shops aware of the range of support and resources available to them, both locally and nationally, and highlight the increased intervention rate of the RRSS.

This included many services run by the SIC, and further information available on its website, support offered through national organisations and additional assistance for voluntary and community organisations.

While projects are still ongoing, those which have completed have supplied information on the energy usage of old and new items. Following recent calculations, it can be reported that:

- The average energy savings between old and new appliances was 57.5%
- Total estimated kWh savings per year, projects completed to date: 20,543.47 kWh
- Tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent saved per year, projects completed to date: 4.362 tCO<sub>2</sub>e
- Total saving on electricity costs, of projects completed to date: £7,198.11

Other benefits have included reconfiguring shop floor space to increase the amount of shelving and display space to stock more/new products, and installing a PIR system to make lights automatic in less used areas of the shop.

Through this scheme, the department have gained more insight into key issues such as:

- Both private and community owned rural shops are struggling, many with the same issues, with some struggling more than others;
- Some shops are not applying for the grant as they have much bigger issues to resolve before they would consider an application;
- Many rural shops are struggling to recruit/retain staff and/or volunteers (if community owned);
- Practical knowledge on how shops can invest to save money and energy usage in the future.

Uptake of the Rural Retail Services Scheme grant and feedback from rural shops has been positive.

One business made two applications to the RRSS, one to upgrade lighting to LED and add a PIR system to less used areas to switch off lights when no one was there, the other to upgrade an old chiller.

In terms of savings, switching to LED and installing a PIR system to some areas saved them 48.6% in their annual lighting energy usage. When worked out with their unit price at the time, this equated to an annual saving of £3,349.10 on their lighting alone. The saving from upgrading their chiller was 47.2%, equating to an annual saving of £1,855.39 on their energy costs.

They were delighted with the lighting and chiller upgrades, as well as the energy savings - stating that, thanks to the energy savings, the payback on their financial contribution to the lighting project was under 4 months.

With rising costs and other financial pressures, they would have struggled to upgrade these items without financial support. The grant encouraged them to have the confidence to make the investment.

What has worked well is that shops, councillors, partners and other SIC departments now know to contact Economic Development to look at how we can work together to support local rural shops with SIC Community Development team working to identify all target businesses.

Following the instruction of this scheme, staff are undertaking follow up visits in the coming months to undertake end of project monitoring and feedback on how the shops found the scheme. We may get insights from this on any improvements we could make.

### Period Products Online

#### SIC, Community Learning and Development Team & Partners

When Scotland became the first country in the world to make period products free for everyone in 2021, local authorities were required to carry out consultations with local communities. This was to find out:

- where people would like products to be made available;
- how people would like to obtain them;
- the type of products that may be preferred.



Shetland Islands Council had already been providing free access to period products for anyone who menstruates and attends a school in Shetland or who is Home Educated since 2018, as well as in some community venues. During 2022, a survey was carried out and products became available in many community venues including all leisure centres and all health centres.

In 2023, **free period products became available to order online** through HeyGirls, a social enterprise. Online ordering was the most popular way to get free period products as seen through consultation, so it was important to set this up. Some people may find it difficult to access free products at local pick-up points, perhaps due to location, lack of transport or a health condition. People can now have their products of choice, reusable or disposable, delivered directly to their door. While beneficial to all in Shetland, this may be particularly useful for island communities.

This contributes to the cost of living driver. By being able to access free period products online, or, in community venues, parents, carers and young people do not need to spend their money on these products, leaving more money for other costs of living.

# Supporting the next generation to thrive

## Raising Attainment

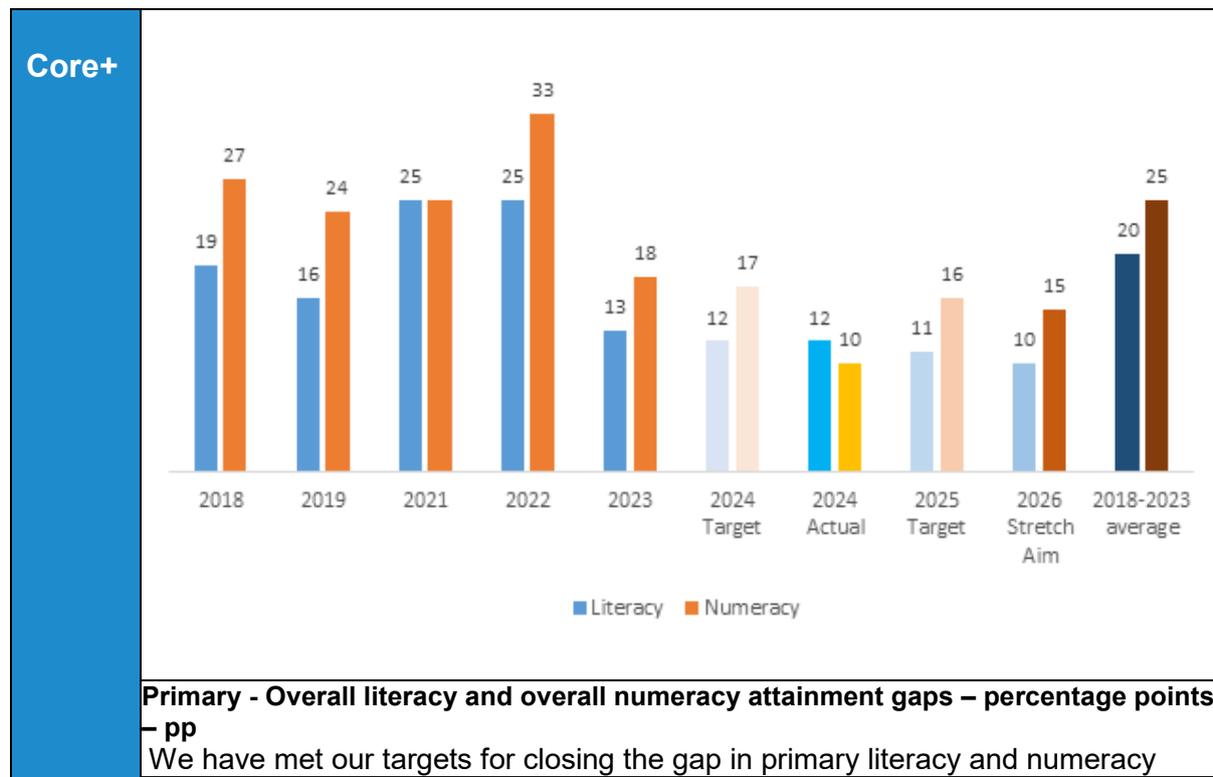
SIC Children's Services

Information regarding Children's Services progress on *Closing the Poverty Related Attainment gap* is reported through the National Improvement Framework report: *The Ambition – Excellence and Equity for Shetland's Learners 2023-24*.

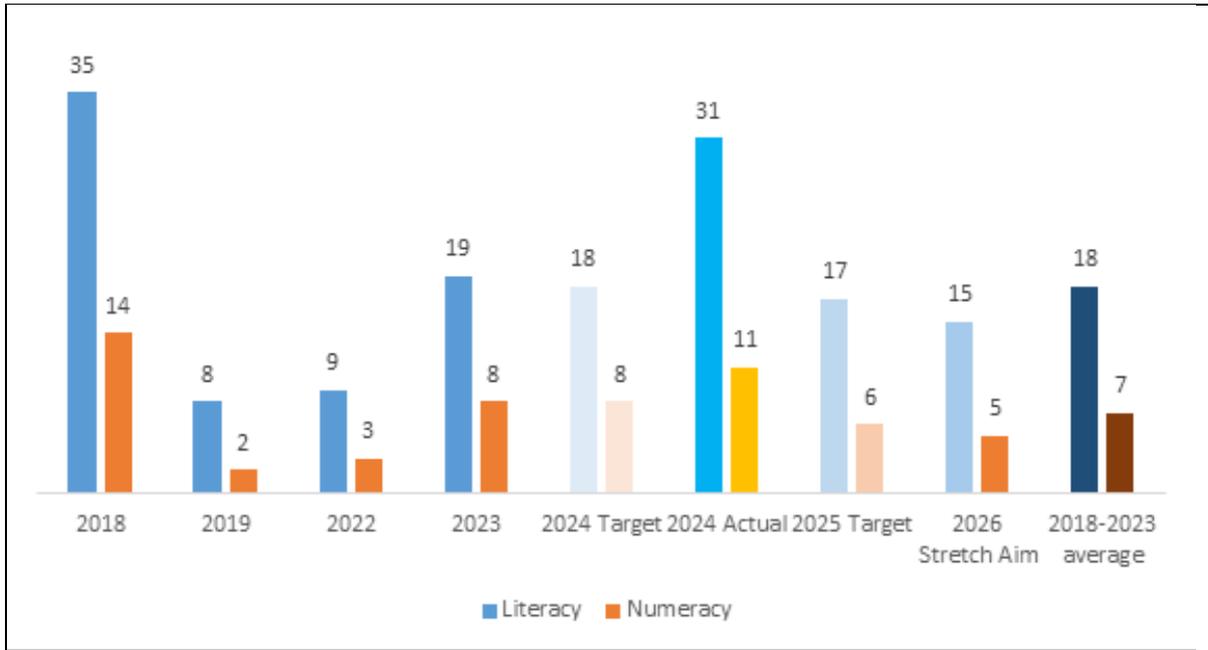
This report states that efforts to close the poverty related attainment gap have resulted in positive moves towards educational equity during the reporting year. This is an ongoing commitment to ensure that every learner, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Attainment results for 2022-23 as published in Spring 2024, shows that we have exceeded our 'gap' targets at National 5 and Higher for children in receipt of free school meals and for those with an additional support need. The extended free school meal scheme has increased the number of children receiving free school meals and we have captured this entire cohort of learners in our data analysis, not just those who meet the Scottish Government criteria.

The graph below show how the poverty related attainment gap in primary assessment data for 2024 has reduced, and by more than the target percentage reduction planned for in numeracy.

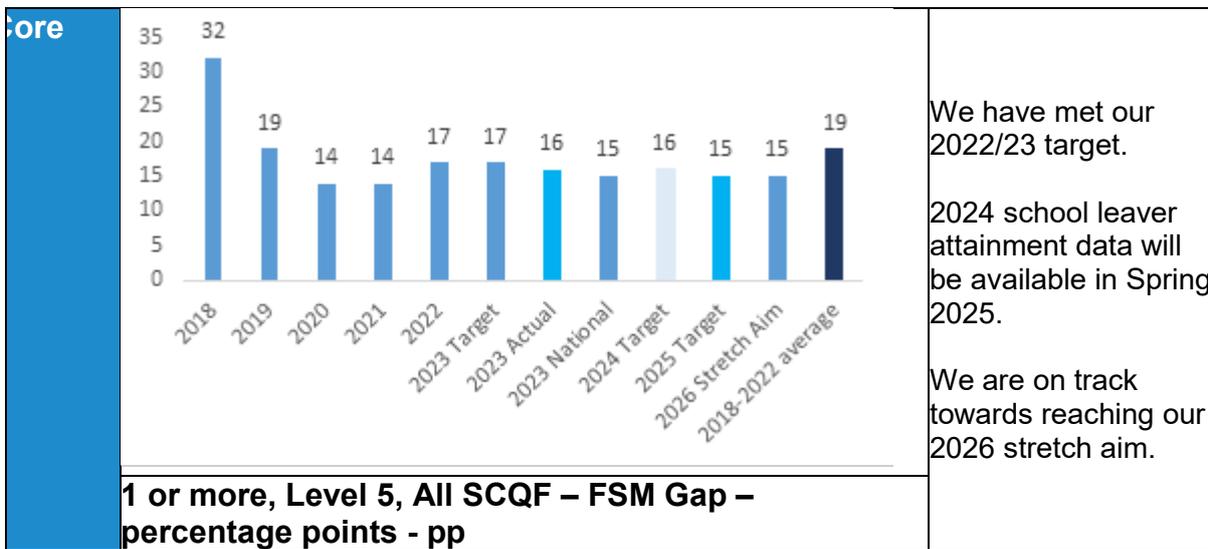


In secondary 3, the target for 2024 has not been met and the gap has increased significantly in attainment in literacy. Analysis of this data set is being carried out by officers to better understand the variables responsible for this across schools so as to put in place measures to improve this and reduce the gap.



**Secondary 3 - Overall literacy and overall numeracy attainment gaps – percentage points - pp**  
 We have not met our targets for closing the gap in secondary literacy and numeracy.

The data regarding the attainment gap for both level 5 and 6 qualifications has been met for the data sets that are published for 2022/23 as can be seen in the two graphs below.

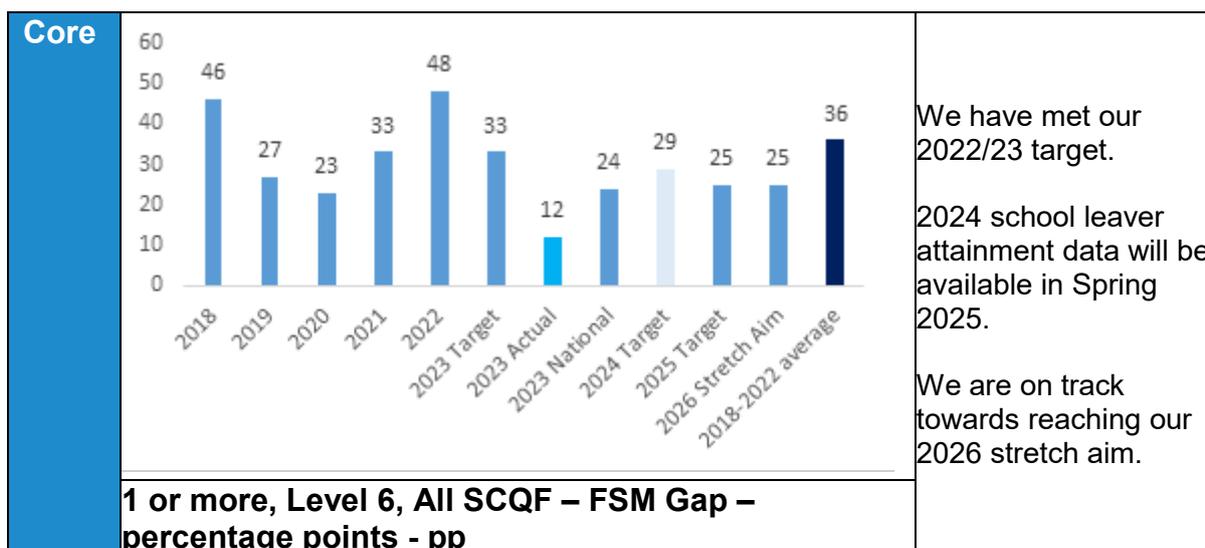


We have met our 2022/23 target.

2024 school leaver attainment data will be available in Spring 2025.

We are on track towards reaching our 2026 stretch aim.

**Level 5, All SCQF – FSM Gap – percentage points - pp**



### Achievement and Closing the Gap through Bridges Project SIC, Youth & Employability Service

The Bridges Project supports young people (14-19 years) who live throughout Shetland. Participants have a personalised timetable of classes, courses and activities that aim to improve confidence, self-esteem, motivation, employability skills and qualifications. This assists them to overcome barriers in order to move into employment, training or further education.

Despite relatively high positive destination figures, there are still a small number of young people leaving school in Shetland with zero or very little accreditation/qualifications. A programme of personalised sessions in Numeracy and Literacy is included in the Bridges offer and supports our efforts in closing the attainment gap between most and least disadvantaged children and young people in our community.

Young people and Bridges support staff wrote up learning agreements for tailored programmes, personalised to meet the needs of all young people, at their individual pace and helping the young people reengage in formal learning, supporting their transition from school and goal setting for their future.

Once a timetable was set in place, Numeracy and Communication students began one-to-one or small group classes at their determined level. These classes were delivered by a tutor (trained teacher) within the Youth and Employability Team, before being verified and submitted to the SQA through Shetland College University of Highlands and Islands (UHI).

Teaching at Bridges encompasses the key features of youth work delivery:

- Young people choose to take part;
- The work begins where the young person is at socially, emotionally and academically;
- The young person is a joint partner in the learning process.

Wherever possible, learning was linked to student interests. For example, Talking and Listening assessments included presentations on Make-Up, The World Cup, CBD Oil, and Fishing in Shetland's Lochs. Numeracy was also contextualised whenever there was an opportunity to do this - for example, measuring wood in the workshop for a bench-making project or using area and block size to determine how many blocks are needed as an apprentice bricklayer.

As of August 2023, **19 Awards were achieved in National 4/5/6 in Communication and Numeracy** out of 26 enrolments.

Out of the participants taking part, **64% went on to enrol at College or University or find full time work**. The other **36% are continuing with the Employability Pathway or Bridges Project**.



The following quotes from Bridges students, parents and partners help to bring to life the real value of these statistics.

*"I'd lost all my confidence, suffered with anxiety and panic attacks 24/7, and was losing hope that things could ever get better for me. I was struggling to get out of bed most days, and hardly left the house. I remember the first time I came in to meet with my support worker, I had to take my mam with me as I was SO anxious...I never thought that just over a year later I'd be going to college and even thinking about going to uni someday too! I finally feel like myself again, and you've all played such a massive part in that!"* (N6 Communication and Numeracy Student, now Introduction to Social Work Student at Shetland College UHI.)

*"I'm really loving work and I'm so grateful to you all at Bridges for helping me get here. I was really worried about leaving school and Bridges was the stepping stone I needed."* (N5 Communication and Numeracy Student - now Salmon Farm Employee)

*"Bridges has been absolutely brilliant for my son who has ASD and couldn't cope at school. It was a great environment for him and he has got so much out of it...My son is now going to start college and that wouldn't have been possible without Bridges."* (N4 Communication and Numeracy Student's Parent. Young person now PDA Accountancy student at Shetland College UHI.)

One of the most significant changes to next year's classes will be to improve transitions by delving deeper into prospective student's school support. Staff will focus on contacting student support staff to ask for detailed information about academic support in English and Maths classes to ensure that they are always informed and offering opportunities appropriate to each student's learning needs.

This year, mixed level classes in Communication have been trialled and differentiated by outcome, within the National 4 and 5 courses. The personalised nature of this teaching approach means that young people are supported at their own level, yet alongside others working at another level.

This year sees the addition of the N4/N5 National Progression Award in Mental Health and Wellbeing. Ten students are currently timetabled for this class, which offers great potential for progression into many Further Education courses. What is more, this is a crucial time for young people to learn about mental health and how to build skills around positive mental health. This SQA recognised course will support young people to find tools for life and the world of work.

## Parenting Classes – Widening Access and Removing Stigma SIC, Family Centre



The Family Centre's central aim is to support all families in all stages of parenting with effective evidence based programmes:

**Peep Learning Together Programme (0-3 years):** Peep sessions offer a fun and engaging way for parents and carers to support their child's early development, learn new skills and connect with other families in their community. Each session is designed to enhance children's communication and language skills, promote healthy play, physical activity and support children's social and emotional development while having lots of fun together.

**The Incredible Years (3-11 years):** Positive Parenting programme which strengthens the parent and child relationship as well as enabling parents to understand and effectively manage challenging behaviour.

**Teen Triple P (12-16 years):** Strengthening the parent and teen relationship in similar methods to above.

There has been a recognised positive impact on families who undertake the programmes in recent years. However, in the last two years, the Family Centre has focused on destigmatising this work to encourage more parents to self-apply and to increase uptake and visibility of positive parenting. Previously, there was a perception in the community that parenting classes were something for 'bad parents' to take part in. The new approach has been to take away this stereotype and make the Family Centre's work something any parent can aspire to.

They have done this through:

- **Professional enrolments** - Social Work and Education staff completing the programmes so they can recommend and signpost effectively;
- **Partnership approaches** - Working with NHS Shetland to make sure there is a pathway right from pre-natal for future parents to be made aware of the programmes. This helps create a more positive image of parenting support;
- **Mapping** all available parenting resources in Shetland with organisations such as Ability Shetland, Mind Your Head and Relationships Scotland to enable parents find appropriate support;
- **Increasing social media visibility** through 'Showing Faces' making Parenting Programmes something to be proud of and encouraging participants to share their experiences to positively promote and **remove stigma of the service**;
- **Peer mentoring** - by mainstreaming the offer and having a less targeted approach, there is a greater diversity and experience of participants taking part.

The service has seen a huge impact for those who take part in the programmes.

*"I have seen an amazing turnaround in my relationship with my daughter and wider family. My daughter is much happier and I am seeing **Miracles** happen since using the parenting tools."* (Parent participant of Teen Programme)

The Family Centre uses *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (SDQ) to assess potential future outcomes for children involved. This is a 25-item measure designed to assess behaviours, emotions and relationships over the last six months in children and young people aged 2–17 years. If a child scores in the clinical range (17), they are two times more likely to leave school without qualifications,

four times more likely to become dependent on drugs, six times more likely to die before age 30, and 20 times more likely to end up in prison).

The Family Centre programmes demonstrate children's SDQ score declining with over **60% of children in the 'clinical range' coming out of it after parents have completed the course**. This is in line with national data which shows that evidence based parenting programmes prevents two thirds of these children getting caught up in these troublesome pathways.

There has been an overall increase in sign-ups to parenting programmes and self-applications in the last year because of this positive promotion (Incredible Years data below demonstrates this).

For 2024, they are set to engage with 104 families, double the number from 2023.

The Family Centre is now looking to expand its provision to meet this demand.

The success of working in partnership has seen co-production of a new signposting document, launched in August 2024, highlighting all parenting provision in the isles and the various organisations and resources available to Shetland families. There are also plans to create a local podcast series to increase and widen overall promotion of positive strategies to parents and the wider community.

While the service still works with targeted referrals, the focus of the work has been to open up access to any parent and to promote the programmes as a positive experience for families. By having teachers and social workers take part in the programme, it not only improves their professional insight but also enables them to positively recommend programmes. This also changes the perception of the programmes and those taking part.

The increase in visibility and '*Showing Faces*' campaign through social media has been observed by staff as the biggest reason for increase in self-referrals. By having local professionals talk about their experience of the course and be willing to share and signpost to families has been a powerful method of removing stigma and encouraging others to seek support.

Working in partnership with NHS and being able to promote the programmes at pre-natal stage has also worked well. Through creating the signposting document, it is encouraging more partnership work to make sure anyone seeking parenting support can find the right resource or programme for them.

One of the areas for improvement highlighted by staff is to maintain contact and follow-up work with families. It is hoped the partnership development with other agencies/organisations will continue to support those that need it the most.

### **Mareel Takeover – Increasing Arts Access via Youth Participation** (Shetland Islands Council, Youth Development Team & Shetland Youth Voice Forum)

The *Mareel Takeover* aimed to enhance opportunities and widen access to the arts for young people in Shetland no matter their social or economic background or family circumstances. The aim was to bring young people from across localities together to take part in fun cultural activities demonstrating the power of partnership work and lived experience between local organisations and young people.



Staff in the service had heard from young people that there was a lack of affordable, accessible larger events that brought them and their peers together. Previous examples of this were cited such as the Lerwick Tall Ships Race where gigs and activities took place over many days and were aimed at all ages. In a local Good Mental Health for All Paper published in 2023, there was evidence that people in the community felt there was not enough non-sporting activities available for people to participate in. Alongside this, some participants from the service stated that they didn't feel their local arts centre (Mareel) was 'for them'. Staff wanted to change their perceptions of this in a positive and accessible way and embed UNCRC Article 31 (Right to Rest, Relax and Play).

The service collaborated with Shetland Arts Development Agency to host a large-scale free event for young people. In order to make the activities and performances as relevant as possible, Youth Development Workers worked alongside a local youth forum (Shetland Youth Voice) to help curate the activities on offer. A survey also went out to all youth club members to see which activities would be most popular for young folk. Young people from the forum helped facilitate the day and evening events too alongside Youth Workers from all Shetland settings.

The event comprised of larger capacity activities such as free interactive sing-along movies in the afternoon and standing concerts at night featuring younger contemporary local bands, established local musicians and more traditional Scottish Country Dancing. Alongside this were more focused and hands-on activities for smaller groups to try Dance, Crafting, Photography and Film-making.

In order to increase accessibility, the service also coordinated times to coincide with public transport on the day and booked extra bus transport to each geographical area to and from the event.

Over 150 young people (aged between 5-17 years old) from across the isles attended the event at some point through the day and a similar number at night.

*"Bairns have really enjoyed this, it would be great to see more of this happening"* (Parent)

*"Massive appreciation for what has gone into today – amazing to have a gig like this for them."* (Parent)

*"Thanks so much to everyone involved – it was very much appreciated"* (young person)

The feedback from young people and their families was overwhelmingly positive.

While the offer was for all young people and not targeted, staff observed there were families who had not visited Mareel before attending and parents commented that free transport had made it possible to attend.

The partnership between the service, creative workshop facilitators and Shetland has been strengthened after the event with commitment from Shetland Arts to host four similar events in the future. There is also a willingness from their staff to join the Youth Work Network (an informal support group between local authority and third sector staff, and a space for discussing local issues affecting young people).

Youth workers knew families who benefited specifically from the fact the event was free and that they could get there and back from outlying communities.

Staff from both Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Arts worked together in advance of the day and this has strengthened the organisational relationships so that more of these days can happen in the future. By involving venue staff in the local Youth Work Network, both sets of staff can benefit in their own development too and Mareel can be a more inclusive venue for young people.

The workshop element was extremely popular with places booked up quickly in advance. It proved there is a demand for participation in the arts and culture. The fact that young people led on the curating of these activities clearly proved effective with how popular they were.

While the turnout and feedback was very positive, the service noted that older aged youths did not turn up in the same numbers. From speaking to some young people who didn't attend, it is clear there needs to be something provided for that specific age (14+) and the promotion/branding of the event needs to be geared towards that age rather than generically to all youth club aged participants in the community. The service, alongside Shetland Arts, plans to focus on how to promote activity for this age group in the next year with commitment already given in the form of use of the building for four different events.

## Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Challenges

As you will see, there is a huge amount of activity and effort from various organisations in Shetland going into reducing child poverty, mitigating its impact on families in Shetland and tackling the causes.

The case studies in this report demonstrate this commitment from organisations, communities and staff as well as a willingness to work in partnership. If Shetland is serious about tackling child poverty, this ethos of working better together will have to continue and grow in the midst of less resource/funding and competing priorities.

Despite the difference that these activities have made to people's lives, Child poverty is still increasing locally and nationally. As we prepare for our next Action Plan in 2026, it is important we are examining the data available to us (both quantitative and qualitative) and that we are listening to the voices of those being affected in our community. It is also vital we continue to adapt and learn from all activity and analyse what worked and could be improved.

We need to continually ask the key questions:

**'How can we support parents to enter, sustain and progress in work?'**

**'How do we support families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs?'**

**'How do we support the next generation to thrive?'**

We also need to ask what all this looks like. **What are the indicators and outcomes we want for our community and who is doing what?**

With so many local and national priorities, it is also important we are making connections between policy and practice. For example, staff realising the link between UNCRC, Poverty and being Trauma Informed or being more aware of Shetland Partnership and its aims and values.

One of the barriers that we have heard from some services/organisations in making such connections and forward planning is the way some of the activities are funded. While additional resource in the form of external or government funding is welcomed, planning any actions without knowing the extent of resources available year on year has been difficult for some services. The specific funding conditions have also been cited as limiting some of the scope of the work done in some areas. It is important that we continually feedback to national partners around any limitations in order to make progress on this.

## Appendix 1 : Background and Legislative Requirements

The requirement to produce an Annual Child Poverty Action Report (ACPAR) is set out in the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#)<sup>1</sup>.

The legislation states that the report must ‘**describe any measures taken in the area of the local authority during the reporting year...for the purpose of contributing to the meeting of the child poverty targets.**’ The Act also requires local authorities and NHS Boards to set out, in their local child poverty action reports, information on measures that they plan to take to contribute to the meeting of the Child Poverty reduction targets set out in the Act, with the aim of ensuring the reports provide a strategic forward look as well as an account of progress to date.

The Act sets out a **clear agenda for tackling, reporting on and measuring child poverty**. The Act:

- Sets out four statutory income targets, to be met in the financial year beginning 1 April 2030.
- Sets out four interim income targets, to be met in the financial year beginning 1 April 2023.
- Places a duty on Scottish Ministers to publish child poverty delivery plans in 2018, 2022, and 2026, and to report on those plans annually.
- Places a duty on local authorities and health boards to report annually on activity they are taking, and will take, to reduce child poverty.
- Sets out that a statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission will be established from 1 July 2019, with functions related to the child poverty reduction targets.

The Act sets out four statutory, **income-based targets (all after housing costs)**, to be achieved by 2030:

- Less than 10% of children are in relative poverty
- Less than 5% of children are in absolute poverty
- Less than 5% of children are in combined low income and material deprivation
- Less than 5% of children are in persistent poverty

The Act also sets out **interim targets**, to be met in the financial year beginning on 1 April 2023 – which is the halfway point between the position at the time the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act was passed and the 2030 target date for the meeting of the targets - as below:

- Less than 18% of children are in relative poverty
- Less than 14% of children are in absolute poverty
- Less than 8% of children are in combined low income and material deprivation

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/contents/enacted>

- Less than 8% of children are in persistent poverty.

[Guidance](#)<sup>2</sup> on the approach and content of the ACPAR is available. The key considerations are:

- Production of one Report for Shetland (the first covering 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019);
- The Council and NHS Shetland are required to jointly prepare and publish a report, but are encouraged to involve all partners contributing to reducing Child Poverty (through Community Planning);
- Aim to publish by 30<sup>th</sup> June each year, after local approval by the Council and NHS Shetland;
- Feedback will be provided from the Scottish Government;
- Links should be made with implementation of the:
  - Fairer Scotland Duty
  - Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
  - Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and
  - Education (Scotland) Act 2016;
- Evidence must be provided that shows consideration is being given to the different barriers that parents with different protected characteristics<sup>3</sup> may face and specifically include action to help parents to maximise income, by accessing financial inclusion services;
- Evidence that shows lived experience of poverty is being brought into strategic decision-making;
- In addition, the guidance highlights the following for inclusion:
  - Sharing 'what's working' and 'lessons' learnt
  - Reference to work to tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
  - The building and nurturing of relationships across the partnership, and
  - Demonstration of partner involvement in activity to meet poverty targets.

The [Scottish Government's Delivery](#)<sup>4</sup> Plan identifies a number of priority groups being targeted as particular beneficiaries of the Plan's commitments:

- Lone parents
- Families where a member of the household is disabled
- Families with 3 or more children
- Minority ethnic families
- Families where the youngest child is under 1
- Mothers aged under 25

Living in areas of high material deprivation and remote rural locations were also identified as additional barriers faced by families in these groups.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-child-poverty-action-report-guidance/>

<sup>3</sup> Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/>

## Appendix 2: Plan for 2023-26

A new approach has been developed by partners, for the planning and implementation of future actions to address Child Poverty across our communities.

We have mentioned that levels of children living in low income families are higher than pre-pandemic levels and our cost of living is high. We also know that stigma and pride are significant barriers to families accessing support. This has informed our priorities, which are:

- Normalising family support, and ensuring child and family centred approaches, across all of our supports; and
- Increasing the income to our families.

This summary table sets out the collaborative strategic actions to be undertaken in Shetland, to (primarily) mitigate the impacts of Child Poverty. These actions are also set out in Shetland's Children's Services Partnership Plan, Priority Area 3 – Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Children and Families.

What Action Will Be Taken?	Which Groups Will be Targeted to Reduce Poverty?	Who Will Carry Out the Action?	What Resources Are Required?	Timescale	Poverty Driver	Impact Will Be Assessed by....
Support our Anchor for Families Team to walk alongside families who are feeling under pressure, to build their strengths and capacity to achieve the goals they want to achieve, develop a more positive pathway and halt further deterioration in their situation.	All families in Shetland living in poverty and feeling under pressure due to the increase in cost of living	<b>Council's Children &amp; Families Social Work Team</b> , in partnership with other services and communities	Whole-Family Wellbeing Funding	Funding in place until March 2026	All drivers, by taking a family-centred, holistic and flexible approach	Number of families supported / year  Evaluation as per Anchor for Families Logic Model
<b>Providing the opportunities and integrated support adults need to enter, sustain and progress in work</b>						

<p>Develop an innovative test of change project to find financially vulnerable households, supporting them holistically, to improve their finances and employment, as a collaboration between Anchor for Families, Employability Pathway and Third Sector.</p>	<p>Low income families with children</p>	<p><b>Council's Youth &amp; Employability Service</b>, in partnership with other services and communities</p>	<p>Scottish Government Child Poverty Fund</p>	<p>Funding in place until September 2024</p>	<p>Out of Work and In Work Poverty  Cost of Living</p>	<p>Monitored within Employability Pathway Monitoring and Evaluation Framework</p>
<p><b>Maximising the support available for families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs</b></p>						
<p>Increase the capacity of frontline staff to recognise signs of poverty and ensure they are on an income maximisation pathway. This capacity will be built by, for example, our Anchor for Families Team, implementation of GIRFEC, Money Worries Training and Cost of the School Day.</p>	<p>All those people in Shetland facing poor outcomes because of inequalities, including children living in poverty</p>	<p><b>SIC, NHS Shetland, CAB, Shetland Recreational Trust, Shetland Arts Development Agency and Others</b></p>	<p>Within Existing Staff Resources</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Cost of Living  Low Income</p>	<p>Attendance at Money Worries Training (number / services represented)  Number of Cost of the School Day Events / Sessions  Evaluation of System Change, as per Anchor for Families Logic Model  Uptake of income maximisation services (SICAB, SIC Children's Finance, Social Security Scotland, Fuel Bank</p>

						<p>Vouchers, SIC Finance, Free Period Products, free ELC for eligible two year olds)</p> <p>Uptake of Access to Leisure (SRT, SADA, Summer Activities)</p> <p>Uptake of CLD Skills Development to complete benefit forms</p>
Support the implementation of Shetland's response to the Cost of Living Crisis Plan, 2023/24, including an easy to use <a href="#">website</a> , and dedicated phone line.	All families in Shetland living in poverty and feeling under pressure due to the increase in cost of living	<b>Council's Community Planning &amp; Development Service</b> in partnership with others services	Dependent on resources from Scottish Government (awaiting information)	Action Plan under development	Cost of Living Low Income	As per Action Plan
Support Shetland's Community Learning and Development (CLD) Strategy to close the digital poverty gap.	All families in Shetland living in poverty and feeling under pressure due to the increase in cost of living	Through the <b>Community Learning and Development Strategy</b>	Within Existing Resources	Ongoing	Cost of Living Low Income	As per CLD strategy

Continue to support key Third Sector organisations: SICAB, Shetland Food Bank and Food for the Way.	All families in Shetland living in poverty and feeling under pressure due to the increase in cost of living	Funding and staff time from partner organisations	Within Council budgets	Ongoing / timebound contracts in place	Cost of Living Low Income	Contract monitoring in place
<b>Supporting the next generation to thrive</b>						
Use opportunities such as Anchor for Families, Employability Services and Cost of Living supports to enable children and their families to be involved in shaping local policies and measures to reduce the social and economic impact of poverty.	All families in Shetland living in poverty and feeling under pressure due to the increase in cost of living	<b>All</b>	Within Existing Resources	Ongoing	Cost of Living Low Income	Number of examples of changes to local policies and services as a result of involving children and families under pressure

The planning and delivery of actions in order to address structural changes required to reduce Child Poverty, are set out in the [Delivery Plan for Shetland's Partnership Plan, 2023/2027](#).



# Shetland



Shetland is an archipelago in the North Sea, sitting at a latitude of 60 degrees north. There is a population of 22,900, with communities spread throughout. Shetland is known for its unique culture, with its own dialect; for its wildlife, beautiful coast, varied landscape, geology and heritage; and events such as the Up Helly Aa Fire Festivals, Shetland Wool Week and the Shetland Folk Festival. Volunteering is important to communities across Shetland.

There are 7 localities within Shetland; Shetland Central, Shetland North, Shetland South, Shetland West, Lerwick and Bressay, Yell, Unst & Fetlar, and Whalsay & Skerries. For each locality there is a separate profile with information specific to those areas, with additional profiles for the smaller isles.

Infrastructure and facilities vary throughout Shetland. There are 29 Schools, including 2 high schools, 4 junior high schools and 23 primary schools. Shops range from local stores to larger chain supermarkets; and there are an abundance of community facilities, including 47 community halls. Health centres can be found across all localities as well as leisure centres.

Transport around Shetland includes bus routes, ferries to the islands and flights to two of the remote islands. Getting to and from Shetland is by overnight ferry from Aberdeen or Kirkwall, or by flight (leaving and arriving at Sumburgh Airport).

1.2% decrease in population since 2011, the Scotland population overall has increased by 2.7%





22,900 people live in Shetland

11.6% of children are living in poverty, lower than the Scottish average of 20.8%



21.8% of the population are aged 65 and over, 5.5% more than 10 years ago. In Scotland, 20.1% are aged 65 and over, 3.2% more than in 2011





The cost of living in Shetland is 20-65% higher than the UK average

78 Sites of Special Scientific Interest

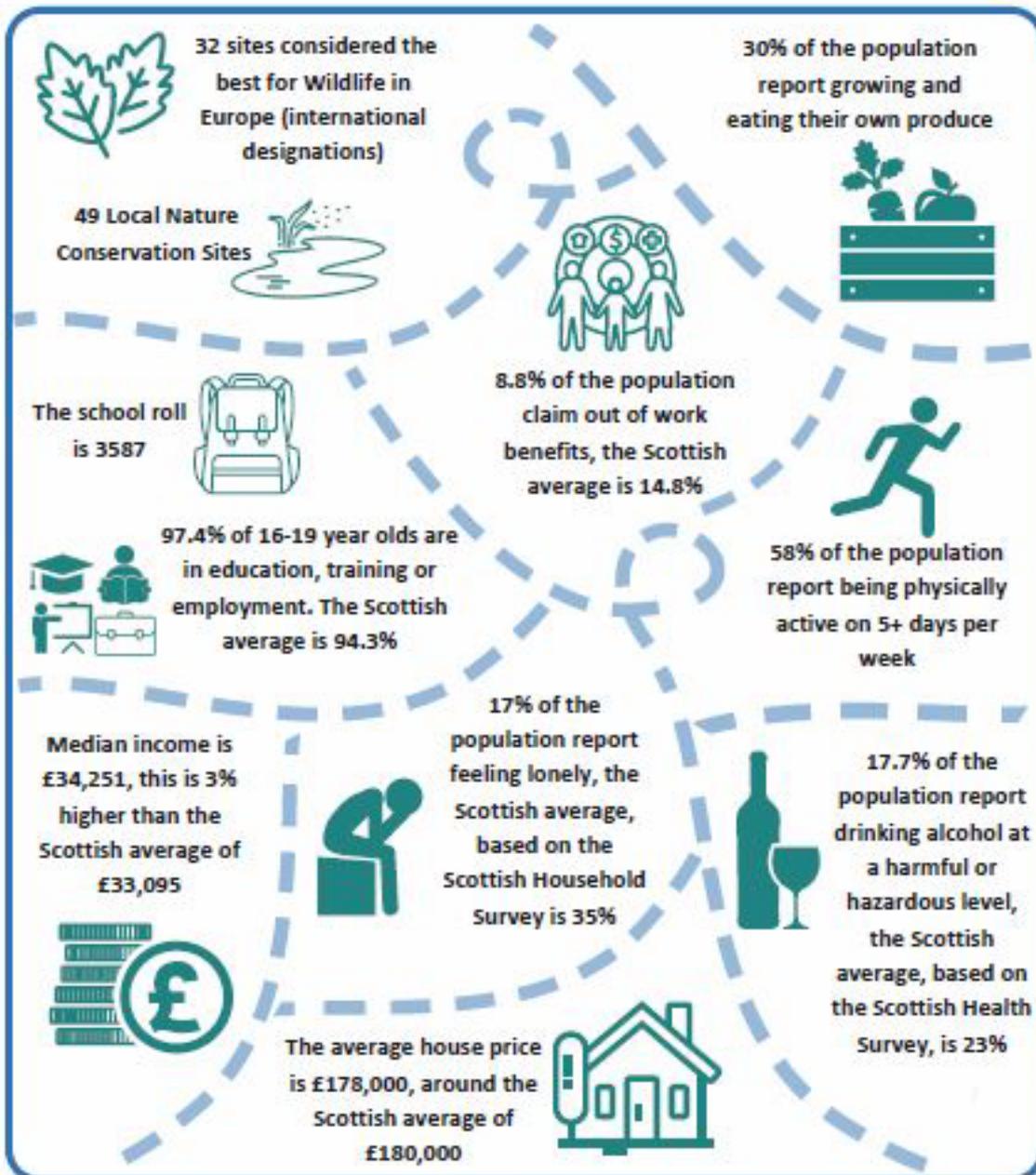


17.9% of the population are under 16 years old, 1.4% less than a decade ago. In Scotland 16.6% are aged under 16, 0.7% less than a decade ago



 [www.shetlandpartnership.org](http://www.shetlandpartnership.org)
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 Published December 2023

Data sources: Department for Work and Pensions 2024; End Child Poverty Local Child Poverty Statistics 2024; Living Well in a High Cost Economy, Ispos Mori, 2017; Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for Remote and Rural Scotland, HIE 2016; Low income, high costs: inequalities and poverty in Shetland, Hirsch and Stone 2021; ScotPHO 2024; NHS Shetland Long Term Health Inequalities Monitoring 2024; Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2024; Public Health Scotland 2024; Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2023, Scottish Government



Locality Profiles are intended to be useful for both communities and partners to provide detailed information at a local level, for purposes including service redesign, local plans and maximising opportunities to seek external funding to support community development. This Shetland Profile includes the data at a Shetland level, compared to Scotland where possible. The Profiles created for each of the 7 localities compare to the Shetland figures where possible.

Data Sources: CACI Paycheck 2022; Highlands and Islands Enterprise - Minimum Income Standard 2016; Improvement Service 2023; National Records Scotland (NRS) Population estimates 2021, Rounded Population estimates (Census) 2022; NHS Shetland Population Health Survey 2021; Scottish Government: House Prices - Residential Properties Sales and Price 2022; Shetland Islands Council Local Development Plan 2014 Appendix B: Environmental Baseline; Shetland Islands Council 2023; Skills Development Scotland, Annual Participation Measure 2023; Scottish Health Survey 2021; Scottish Household Survey 2020. Definitions, full details and links can be found on the Shetland Partnership website.

: [www.shetlandpartnership.org](http://www.shetlandpartnership.org)

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