

NHS Highland



Meeting: Board Meeting
Meeting date: 28 May 2024
Title: Highland Child Poverty Action Report
Responsible Executive/Non-Executive: Dr Tim Allison; Director of Public Health
Report Author: Cathy Steer; Head of Health Improvement

1 Purpose

This is presented to the Board for:

- Assurance

This report relates to a:

- Government policy/directive

This report will align to the following NHS Scotland quality ambition(s):

Safe, Effective and Person Centred

This report relates to the following Strategic Outcome(s)

Start Well	x	Thrive Well	x	Stay Well		Anchor Well	X
Grow Well		Listen Well		Nurture Well		Plan Well	
Care Well		Live Well		Respond Well		Treat Well	
Journey Well		Age Well		End Well		Value Well	
Perform well		Progress well		All Well Themes			

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

The Scottish Government require annual updates on progress of joint Local Authority and NHS Board published Child Poverty Reports. This report provides an update on The Highland Child Poverty Action Report 2022 - 23. It covers the Highland Council area only.

2.2 Background

In 2017 the Scottish Government introduced the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act which includes duties on both the Scottish Government and local partners to address child poverty. The legislation requires local authorities and health boards to jointly prepare annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports, setting out activities that have been undertaken in the area the previous year to reduce child poverty and identifying future activities.

2.3 Assessment

The report provides an update on progress made on identified actions to increase income through employment and income maximisation and to reduce cost of living.

The current update report is for the period ending March 2023. It is acknowledged that work to provide assurance on action undertaken in 2023/24 is still required. There is a proposal by Highland Council to present an update report for 2023/24 in Autumn 2024.

Whilst many children's services remain under the provision of Highland Council, it has been suggested that NHS Boards focus on four identified priority areas to tackle child poverty. These are:

- leadership and accountability.
- staff training.
- our role as an anchor organisation focusing on parental employment and procurement.
- income maximisation

The update report that will be presented to the board later this year will include actions that will support NHS Highland to meet the four identified priority areas outlined above and will link to NHS Highlands Anchors Strategic Plan..

2.4 Proposed level of Assurance

This report proposes the following level of assurance:

Substantial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comment on the level of assurance.

An update report for 2023/24 will be developed by Autumn 2024. It will identify the actions that NHS Highland intend to take to impact child poverty based on the four priority areas outlined above. This report will provide assurance for 2023/24 to ensure that NHS Highland meets the requirements of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act.

3 Impact Analysis

3.1 Quality/ Patient Care

Poverty has an impact on the health and wellbeing of communities and specifically for children living in families impacted by poverty. If we can deliver on some of the identified actions, then we can mitigate some of the worst effects of poverty and make a difference on the gap in health for communities who are the most disadvantaged.

3.2 Workforce

A route out of poverty can be through access to good quality jobs and Fair Work. NHS Highland is a major employer in the organisation that can provide these opportunities. We seek to not only support our workforce through Fair Work and reasonable pay, but also to offer this opportunity to those furthest from the job market and seeking employment.

3.3 Financial

Many of the actions detailed in the plan rely on doing things differently or in partnership rather than financial resources specifically. Some of the actions may require either workforce commitment or funding going forward, but there are no specific financial risks identified in the delivery of the plan.

3.4 Risk Assessment/Management

There are risks if actions on child poverty are not undertaken. These are primarily long-term in relation to health outcomes, partnership and societal risks.

3.5 Data Protection

There are no identified Data Protection issues in the delivery of the actions.

3.6 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

The actions are targeted to those most in need and living in poverty. Since this is an update report there is no impact assessment.

3.7 Other impacts

No other impacts to note.

3.8 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

This is an update report and so areas of communication, involvement and engagement have formed part of the original report.

3.9 Route to the Meeting

This update report sits as a priority theme within the Highland's Integrated Children's Service Plan which provides oversight to the ongoing work of the plan.

4 Recommendation

- **Assurance** – To give confidence of compliance with legislation, policy and Board objectives.

4.1 List of appendices

The following appendices are included with this report:

Appendix one – Highland Child Poverty Action Update Report 22 – 23

Appendix 1

Highland

Local Child Poverty Action Update Report 2022 - 23

November 2023

Contents

Contents	Pages
The Approach in Highland	3
Section 1: Background and Context	4 - 9
The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017	
Poverty in Highland	
Section 2: Action in Highland	10 - 22
Summary of Actions to Address Child Poverty 2022/23	
Section 3: Action in Highland	23 - 25
Actions to be taken to Address Child Poverty 2022/23	

The approach in Highland

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

“To work together to reduce inequality within Highland communities”.

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

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

The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan sets out the vision, purpose and focus for the Highland Community Planning Partnership from 2017-2027. The partnership believes working towards this plan will have a significant impact on reducing inequalities in Highland.

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

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

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

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

The process to review the Integrated Children's Services Plan began during 2022/23. A Strategic Needs Assessment was undertaken to create the evidence base for the new plan and evidence from that can be found in the 2022/23 Action Plan Report. Child Poverty remains a core priority and the actions developed through that process are reflected in section three as actions for 2023/24 – 2025/6. A life courses approach has been taken to the new plan and actions are structured under three life course stages: Getting Started (pre-birth to school), Growing Up (primary) and Moving On (secondary to young adult).

Section 1: Background and Context

Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

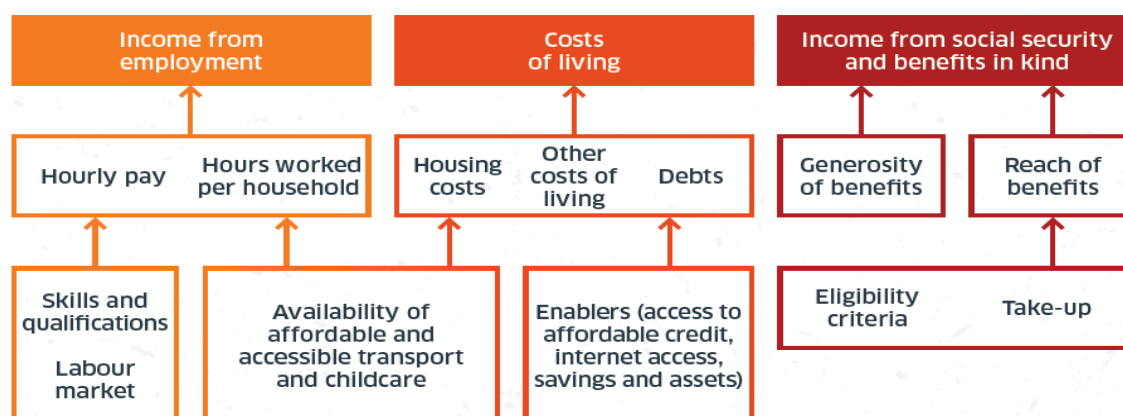
In 2017, the Scottish Government introduced the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act](#). This replaced the previous UK Child Poverty Act 2010 and included duties on both the Scottish Government and local partners to address child poverty. It also introduced income targets as a driver for reducing child poverty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

The legislation requires:

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

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

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



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

¹ A 2023 study found that child poverty in the UK was costing over £39 billion a year -

<https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-child-poverty-2023#:~:text=In%202008%2C%20the%20total%20cost,cost%20could%20be%20substantially%20higher.>

Child Poverty

Research shows that 53 per cent of children in Scotland have experienced poverty in the last 12 years. Across all measures, children are more likely to be in poverty than adults, 24% of children in Scotland were living in relative poverty in 2020-23. Families move in and out of poverty and can easily be pushed into poverty². In 2020/21, around one in five children under 16 were considered to live in relative poverty (below 60 percent of median income after housing costs) in Highland. This figure is comparable to Scotland as a whole ³.

The Child Poverty Action Group reported in 2023:

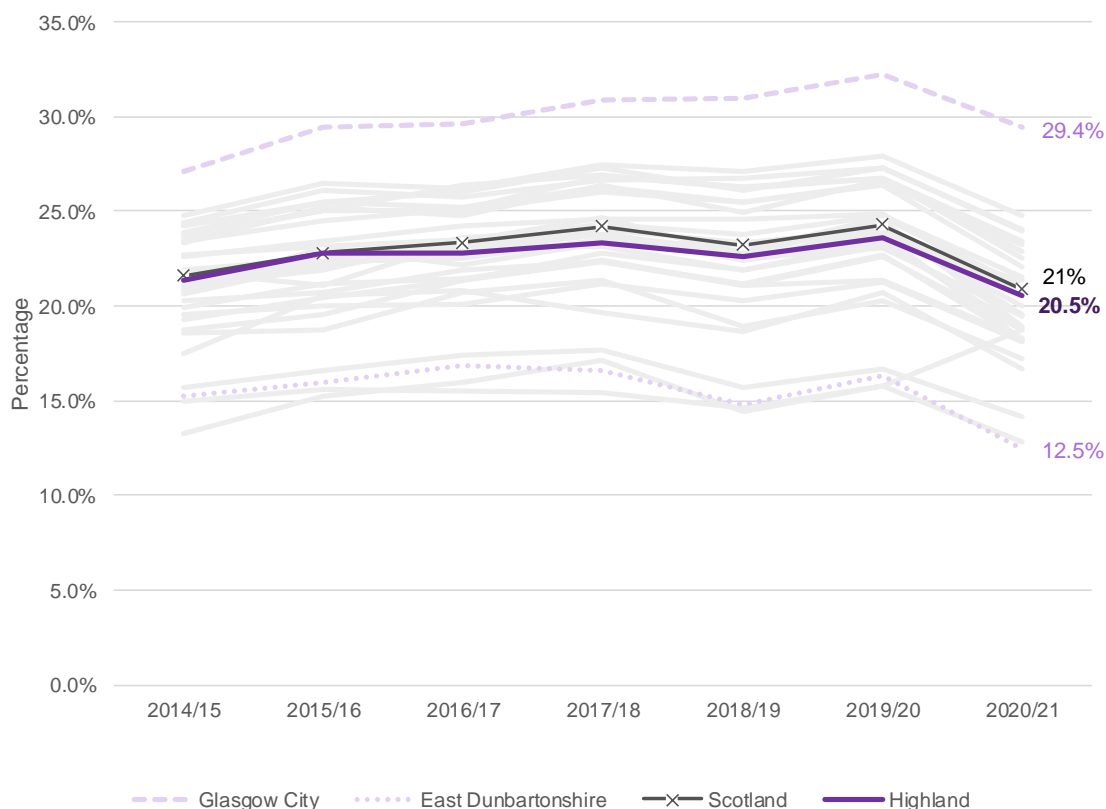
- For out-of-work families in Scotland, social security provides around 60% of the income needed to meet a socially acceptable standard of living.
- Working families in Scotland are often unable to meet the minimum socially acceptable standard of living even if working full time on the 'national living wage'.
- Remote areas of Scotland are at increased risk of being unable to reach a socially acceptable standard of living due to higher cost of essentials.

The latest figures from the End Child Poverty Coalition suggest a reduction in child poverty across Scotland, including Highland, however this is unlikely to yet reflect the impact of covid on low income households nor the more recent challenges related to the cost of living as outlined below.

Figure 2: Percentage of children aged under 16 years living in income poverty after housing costs by Local Authority in Scotland

² Scottish Government. Child Poverty Analysis. [Online] <https://www.gov.scot/collections/child-poverty-statistics/>

³ Stone, J. Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2020/2. Centre for Research in Social Policy Loughborough University for End Child Poverty Coalition; 2022. https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Local-child-poverty-indicators-report-2022_FINAL.pdf



Source: End Child Poverty Coalition

In October 2023, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) published its report *Poverty in Scotland 2023*⁴. Its findings note that:

- The statutory child poverty reduction targets are unlikely to be met without significant additional Scottish Government action.
- While the Scottish Child Payment is likely to reduce child poverty, the growth of in-work poverty is holding back further progress.
- One in four people in working single-parent families are in poverty.
- One in four families with three or more children face in-work poverty.
- Two-thirds of families experiencing in-work poverty said they would not be able to pay an unexpected bill of £200 with their own money or savings.
- Two in five families experiencing in-work poverty were also behind on one or more bill: 14% were behind on their rent or mortgage, 17% behind on their electricity or gas bills.

JFR found that in the UK⁵:

- 43% of families with three or more children were in poverty in 2021/22.
- 44% of children in lone-parent families were in poverty in 2021/22.
- In October 2023:
 - 47% of the poorest fifth of households were in arrears.
 - 72% of households were going without essentials.
 - 58% of households reported not having enough money for food.

⁴ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-scotland-2023>

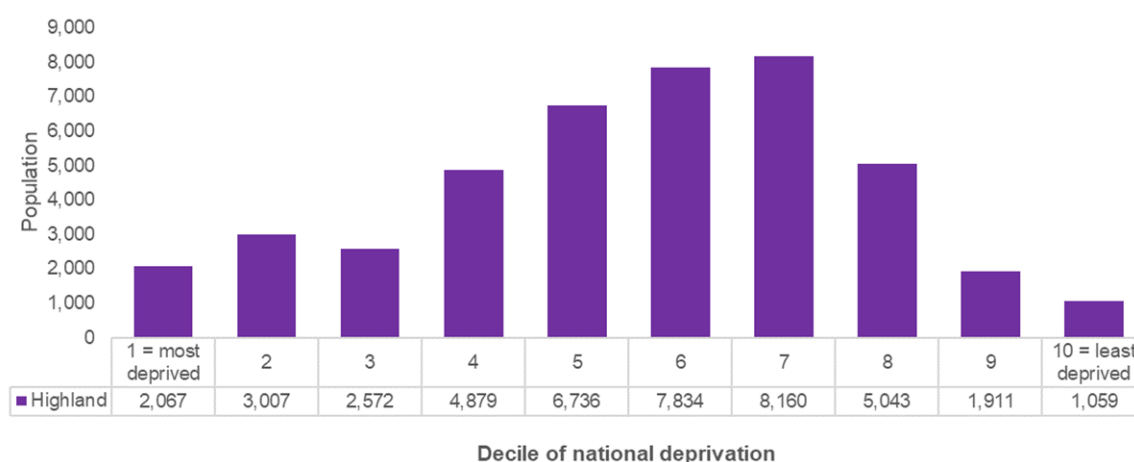
⁵ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

Deprivation

Deprivation, as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, provides further context for Highland. Figure 3 highlights that the majority of the Highland child population live in areas ranked in deciles five to seven nationally i.e. outwith those areas classified as the most deprived. 8% of Highland’s children and young people live in the 15% of areas categorised as most deprived.

Data from the income and employment domains of the SIMD illustrates this, as 81.1% of income deprived and 81.3% of employment deprived people in Highland do not live in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland.⁶

Figure 3: Number of children and young people aged under 18 years of age living in Highland in 2021 by national decile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation



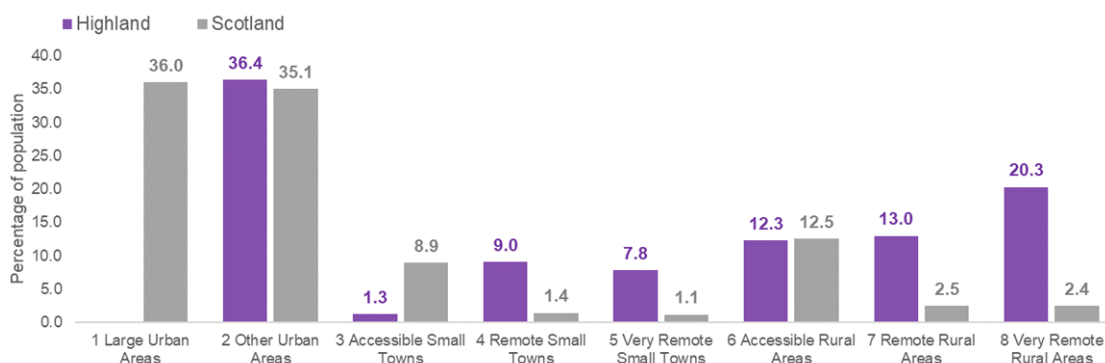
Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 and National Records of Scotland Small Area Population Estimates 2021

Remote and Rural Factors

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

Figure 4: Percentage of the population aged under 18 years of age living in urban and rural areas in Highland and Scotland in 2021

⁶ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/>



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

Remoteness from services and facilities is an important factor in relation to considering poverty and deprivation in Highland with access challenges compounding other disadvantages. In remote and rural areas, low incomes of people are exacerbated by additional costs. This includes more expensive food and clothing, more expensive household goods, increased home energy costs and the costs of transport as shown in work on the Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland.⁷ This highlights that for people living in rural areas of Scotland, a minimum acceptable standard of living typically requires between a tenth and a third more household spending than in urban parts of the UK.

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

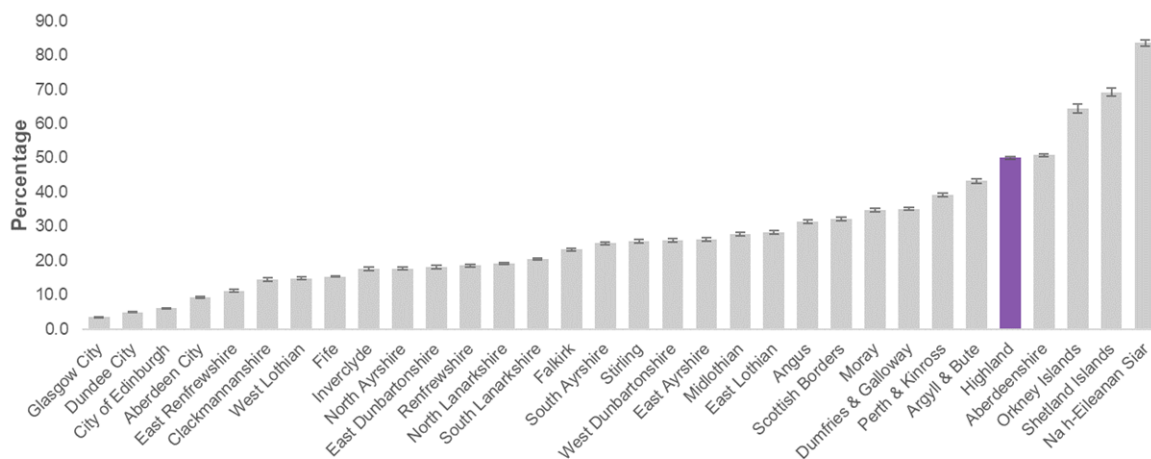
- Less accessible key services including health and social care, childcare and high speed digital networks
- Higher consumption of fuel for heating and transport
- 33% of households in Highland experience fuel poverty (average for Scotland is 24%)⁸
- Reduced opportunities to earn adequate income
- Higher cost of living impacted by prices for basic essential supplies
- Limited frequency and coverage of public transport

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

⁷ *Minimum income standard for Remote Rural Scotland – Policy update 2016*, Loughborough University <http://www.hie.co.uk/common/handlers/download-document.ashx?id=90d6c2f6-a461-4ff8-9902-49f073765e39>

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-islands-data-overview-2023/pages/9/>

Figure 4: Young people living in the most access deprived quintile, aged 00-25 years in 2020



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

In 2022, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Rural College published *Improving our understanding of child poverty in rural and island Scotland*.⁹ It identified that interventions to tackle child poverty in rural and island locations should:

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

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-understanding-child-poverty-rural-island-scotland/>

Section 2: Action in Highland

What have we done to address Child Poverty in 2022/23

The following summarises the key actions identified in the partnership's 2020/21 Child Poverty Action Report against each of the core themes. Progress against each of these actions, alongside actions to address the covid specific circumstances are detailed.

Theme: Income from Employment						
Improvement Priority: Work to reduce the Poverty Related Attainment Gap in Highland						
Area for Action		Progress				
Target the use of SEF to fund collaborative lead officers who work directly with schools 3-18 to improve quality standards and outcomes on a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged.		During 2022/23 there were improvements seen to inspection outcomes across ELC, primary and secondary settings.				
		<p>There were improvements to the literacy and numeracy data across primary schools and some at SCQF level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Highland in S4 to S6, the awards gained by young people in Quintile 1 has improved and remained steady on 2022 figures for S4 achieving 1+ Level 5 awards. • There has been a significant 4% improvement on the previous year for S5 learners from our most deprived areas achieving 1 or more Level 6 awards resulting in a 10% improvement over the last 4 years and reducing the attainment gap for this cohort by 9% over the same time period. 				
		Attainment Gap Between SIMD Quintile 1 and 5*				
		Cohort and SCQF Level	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
		S4 Cohort 1 @ level 5	21	28	22	22
		S5 Cohort 1 @ level 6	38	39	35	27
		S6 Cohort 5 @ level 6	31	37	30	22
		*The difference between quintile 1 and quintile 5 is the attainment gap.				

Area for Action	Progress																																										
<p>Target the use of SEF to fund MCR pathways programme to support care experienced children and young people to achieve a positive destination</p>	<p>Positive destination outcomes for disadvantaged and care experienced young people have improved and the gap with the national average has reduced. However, we are still slightly below the national average.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="779 357 2177 507"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>No</th> <th>Overall %</th> <th>No</th> <th>ASN %</th> <th>No</th> <th>FSM %</th> <th>No</th> <th>LAC %</th> <th>No</th> <th>CEYP %</th> <th>No</th> <th>SIMD 1/2 %</th> <th>No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>MCR</td> <td>22</td> <td>96</td> <td>18</td> <td>95.83</td> <td>21</td> <td>100</td> <td>8</td> <td>100</td> <td>5</td> <td>94.44</td> <td>15</td> <td>83.33</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highland</td> <td>2475</td> <td>95.27</td> <td>2358</td> <td>92.79</td> <td>1301</td> <td>90.39</td> <td>220</td> <td>72</td> <td>18</td> <td>79.94</td> <td>63</td> <td>87.71</td> <td>240</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		No	Overall %	No	ASN %	No	FSM %	No	LAC %	No	CEYP %	No	SIMD 1/2 %	No	MCR	22	96	18	95.83	21	100	8	100	5	94.44	15	83.33	6	Highland	2475	95.27	2358	92.79	1301	90.39	220	72	18	79.94	63	87.71	240
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<p>Set ambitious stretch aims as required by Scottish Government to ensure performance improves to be in line with the national average and develop a collaborate improvement framework to support schools to deliver the improvement.</p>	<p>During 22/23 stretch aims were set in conjunction with the Scottish Government for school leavers attainment. New targets are longer term and progress against them reported annually to Scottish Government and we are currently on track to achieve attainment targets for literacy and numeracy in primary and senior phase attainment indicators are on track. Individual stretch targets will be set for each school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretch aim 2025/26 = 1@ SCQF level 5 for quintile 1 = 6% increase • Stretch aim 2025/56 = 1@ SCQF level 6 for quintile 1 = 8% increase 																																										
<p>Work to continue the roll-out of digital resources to support course materials and literacy and numeracy activities and to support schools register for the Digital Schools Award.</p>	<p>An Education and Learning Digital Strategy was agreed in February 2023 with the aims of ensuring digital technology is central within the curriculum; to support the development of skills and confidence of educators and to improve access to digital technology for all learners.</p> <p>Delivery of digital resources to schools has continued and will continue to be developed as a result of the focus on Workforce for the Future and the digital offering that has been made.</p> <p>Digital learning is a core part of the collaborative improvement framework for primaries, in English and Gaelic medium. This builds on the interrupted learners offer, the online curriculum offer to small secondary schools and pupils unable to access mainstream education.</p>																																										

Theme: Income from Employment	
Improvement Priority: Work to reduce the Poverty Related Attainment Gap in Highland	
Area for Action	Progress
<p>Scottish Attainment Challenge Scotland Fund - Schools Programme- Funded LA strategic plan to support 10 Highland schools with highest levels of deprivation in areas of Literacy; Numeracy and HWB. For 2021/22 there is a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to implement the collaborative improvement framework including targeted training and support for teachers and leaders in relation to literacy, numeracy, assessment, moderation and standardisation • 	<p>The collaborative improvement framework is in place to support management and leadership development at all levels and across all parts of the services. Area based meetings focus on achievement and thematic groups on school improvement are location and context specific.</p> <p>Feedback from school leaders is positive and positive improvement to attainment and inspection outcomes can be seen.</p>
<p>Effective Use of Data as a Lever to attain Educational Equity <i>Series of improved toolkits including planning tools; reflective analysis , data dashboards and support training . Actions include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving Approaches to PEF planning • Improving Data Literacy at all Levels 	<p>Collaborative lead officers scrutinise PEF plans alongside the PEF administrator to ensure they are evidence informed, within budget and in line with content of self-evaluation and school improvement plans.</p> <p>Tracking and monitoring progress of PEF plans are part of collaborative improvement work, with a particular focus on care experienced and other targeted groups of pupils. There has been a series of profession learning sessions delivered by Education Scotland and Highland Council staff to support improved use of data to support literacy and numeracy.</p> <p>Self-evaluation (SECI) training has been delivered in partnership with Education Scotland that has focused on evidencing self-evaluation.</p>

Area for Action	Progress																																																																																																																													
<p>Developing the Young Workforce – Equity of Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through work of the DYW co-ordinators, focus on raising attainment and develop appropriate ambitious guidance Expanding and embedding the My Future My Success programme across Highland. 	<p>We continue to embed Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) in the curriculum, ensuring relevance to the learning the children & young people undertake and ensuring all have access to skills development and entrepreneurial learning. The entitlement through the career education standard, along with work-based learning, develops young people's employability and understanding of the Highland economy. For young people furthest from the labour market, enhanced provision through pathway planning and My Future My Success (MFMS) will create additional opportunities for young people to develop and practice their skills development.</p>																																																																																																																													
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Highland	2475	95.27	2358	92.79	1301	90.39	220	72	18	79.94	63	87.71	240																																																																																																																	
Virtual	24750	95.68		93.9		93.41		89.6				91.95																																																																																																																		
Northern Alliance	9690	95.09		93.05		89.27		81.58				88.39																																																																																																																		
National	54719	95.87		93.69		92.81		87.94				94																																																																																																																		
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Theme: Income from Employment	
Improvement Priority: Improve opportunities for training and apprenticeships for parents and young people as part of the Council's Economic Prosperity Fund	
Area for Action	Progress
Support the roll out of Parental Employability Support Fund programme – targeting 'in work' progression for parents	<p>The Parental Employability Support Fund programme has ceased, with parental support outcomes now embedded within the Child Poverty element of Scottish Government's No One Left Behind (NOLB) support.</p> <p>A total of 125 parents were supported to access employability support under NOLB.</p> <p>The Raised-Up North initiative was developed and launched in 2023, specifically to help working parents in receipt of Universal Credit to access training and development support, with a view to raising their household income. To date 23 people have been helped by the scheme and outcomes in terms of growing household income will be monitored wherever possible.</p> <p>An Employability Child Poverty Co-ordinator joined the Highland Council employability team in August 2023, with an initial focus on working closely with Job Centre Plus colleagues across the Highlands to provide additional support to parents find employment and help working parents' progress. This has resulted in new referrals coming into the Highland Employability Service and in several cases, employment has been secured.</p> <p>Links are also being established with community groups across the Highlands with a view to engaging more parents in need of support.</p>
Support the development of the Young Person Guarantee work placement programme as a way to support job creation	<p>Important to note that the Young Person Guarantee workplace programme has ceased, with outcomes for young people now embedded as part of the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind (NOLB) support.</p> <p>299 young people under the age of 25 were supported through No One Left Behind (67% of the overall total) of which 40 young people under the age of 25 years have been supported through work placement programmes.</p> <p>Individual HEP partners maintain strong links with Highland employers and feedback from them is helping to drive the design of training options and the delivery of recruitment events in communities across the Highlands.</p> <p>A good example of this is the Aim High course where young people undertake the employability award, supplemented by employers offering work experience opportunities based on individual job aspirations.</p>

Develop the Modern Apprenticeship scheme for 16-65 year olds at all levels to support all sectors in Highland, including upskilling and vocational qualifications post Covid-19	The Highland Council Modern/Graduate Apprenticeship programme is suitable for people of all ages (16 – 67yrs old). There are now 25 Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks being used and a further 7 Graduate Apprenticeship frameworks.		
		2021/22	2022/23
	Total Enrolled	484	614
	Total Completed	231	366
	Total undergoing apprenticeship qualifications (MA/GA)	203	176
	New apprenticeships	165	173
Upskilling staff	319	441	

Theme: Cost of Living	
Improvement Priority: Address food insecurity by increasing equity of access to good quality food	
Area for Action	Progress
Continue to lobby Scottish Government the provision of the financial support for families during the school holidays beyond June 2022 and consider Council led support to mitigate.	In partnership with COSLA, work continued to lobby the Scottish Government for school holiday food support for families. Support has been agreed and provided on a year-by-year basis and provided for in summers 2022 and 2023 and other school holidays over that period.
Support the development of sustainable food tables and fridges in order to reduce the stigma associated with accessing food support including the development of a 'How to' guide to support groups wishing to take this forward	<p>During winter 2022/23 the Community Led Initiatives: Cost of Living Support Fund was established to support mitigating the impacts of the cost of living crisis. The Fund was aimed at enabling local groups to respond to the needs of their local communities to support them through the cost of living crisis. The criteria focused on the provision of food and spaces to support local communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide community support initiatives that provide food/activities • Enhance existing provision through extending local hours or introducing/increasing food provision • Adapt existing provision to meet identified local needs • Strengthen or establish food larders or food table provision <p>£450,000 was distributed, supporting 106 projects across Highland. Projects included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a drop in/warm space for individuals to come to where food and activities are provided • Extending the opening hours/number of days of existing community hub provision and supporting free food/drinks as part of the provision • Community hub provision targeted at specific groups within the community e.g. youth provision, older people, families • Supporting or extending food larder provision within local areas • Provision of food parcels or warmth parcels (e.g. with flasks/blankets) for specific vulnerable families or individuals <p>A wide range of local community projects have been developed to provide support around the provision of food. One example is Happy Healthy Hilton which has evolved over this period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the end of 2022, until April 2023 the Cost of Living Support Fund provided funding for Highlife Highland to provide free lunches at the Centre on a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday along with the creation of a foodbank which was support through Cfine.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This developed through the period of April – September 2023, run through the Culduthel Christian Centre, who facilitated one afternoon tea session using the café space within the centre so that the community who attended the meals still had connection to the centre and access. This provided a tea and cake offering. • From September 20-23, Inverness Foodstuff have received funding from the Scottish Government’s Social Isolation and Loneliness to provide free meals on a Wednesday and Friday. As part of the offering work is underway to re-establish access to services so that a community hub approach is taken for the attendees of the meals offering. • The food offering was complemented with access to services such as THC Housing, Welfare, CAB, Police, Fire, access to digital services, Mental Health Support, play sessions for parents and toddlers and access to activities such as nature walks. • Numbers attending are 40/50 people per session. <p>Work continued to promote the availability of the Highland Food Activity Map across Highland communities. The map includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ food banks ○ local food producers ○ community fridges and larders ○ community cafés <p>Highland Council’s Community Support Co-ordinators continues to work with groups during 2022/23 to support the development of sustainable food tables and fridges.</p>
<p>Continue to develop strategies to increase uptake of free-school meals targeted at secondary provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of free school meals was promoted during 2022/3 via social media and direct through school network channels. • National negotiations are ongoing on data sharing to enable automatic awards of free school meals and ensure families do not have to apply. The Council’s Head of Revenues and Business Support is working with COSLA and the Cabinet office to improve data sharing to enable automatic entitlement to encourage greater uptake.

Theme: Cost of Living	
Improvement Priority: Reduce the financial barriers on families	
Area for Action	Progress
Promote the uptake of clothing grants and explore passporting awards	<p>During 2022/23, clothing grants were promoted through schools and social media channels. A shared form was developed to jointly promote free school meals and clothing grant uptake. During 2022/23, 4,398 pupils were entitled to clothing grants.</p> <p>National negotiations are ongoing on data sharing to enable automatic awards of free school meals and ensure families do not have to apply.</p>
Encourage the uptake of concessionary leisure schemes for children with low income backgrounds through specific targeting of the opportunity to free school meals and clothing grants recipients	<p>High Life Highland Budget Leisure Card</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 9,596 households (17,381 individuals) across Highland that have a registered budget card. • Individuals and families in receipt of income related benefits are eligible for the budget scheme where customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ can access leisure centres for fifty pence per visit; or ○ take up a subscription for £3 per month for individuals or £5 for families. (This was introduced in 2022 to encourage increased activity levels and bring the budget card into line with the main leisure subscription scheme) . • The budget card provides the same access to leisure centres as the regular leisure subscription and includes individual activities as well as instructor led/coached activities and swimming lessons. • Access to the scheme is promoted through schools.
Promote and raise awareness of fuel discounts and grants and energy advice and switching services	<p>During 2022/23, the welfare team identified potential beneficiary households for energy and fuel advice and referred direct to the Energy Advice project run by CAB.</p> <p>Inverness CAB undertake checks and provided advice regarding switching, during 2022/23, in excess of 2,600 households were referred for energy advice and support.</p> <p>During 2022/23 the Council supported over 16,000 households to benefit from a range of different Highland Council fuel discounts including Low Income and Energy Support payment.</p>
Implementation of the Northern Alliance <i>Cost of the School Day Toolkit</i>	<p>The Cost of the Day Toolkit was piloted in a number of schools during 2021/22 and this was expanded during 2022/23 with the aim of rolling out to all schools in 2023/24.</p> <p>Awareness raising of the purpose and impact of Cost of the School Day has been delivered through staff CPD session to support embedding the approach going forward.</p>

Theme: Cost of Living	
Improvement Priority: Increase access to and uptake of affordable and flexible childcare	
Area for Action	Progress
Support the uptake of 1140 hours ELC provision	<p>All parents now have access to 1140 within their community or within reasonable travelling distance. 1140 hours is offered to all or pro-rata according to eligibility dates and only where parents request less do they get that.</p> <p>1140 is promoted across Local Authority and partner Private, Voluntary and Independent providers around enrolment time with press releases, each individual setting advertises what they offer. Some offer drop ins or information sessions. Work is undertaken to promote uptake through key universal service teams and the health visitor/midwifery financial inclusion pathway promotes childcare entitlement.</p>
Support the uptake of eligible 2 year old ELC provision	<p>Work is ongoing to access eligibility data from national sources in order to directly target the offer to parents/carers of eligible 2s. For eligible 2s, the Council writes to parents/carers 3 times per year to make the offer and encourage take-up.</p> <p>1140 is promoted around enrolment time with press releases and each individual setting advertises what they offer. Some offer drop ins or information sessions. Work is undertaken to promote uptake through key universal service teams and the health visitor/midwifery financial inclusion pathway promotes childcare entitlement.</p>
Continue to promote Scottish child payment and Scottish child disability payment	<p>A strategy has been developed to promote awareness of access to childcare cost supports.</p> <p>HMRC advice on access to childcare costs and tax-free childcare is promoted across partnership networks in Highland. The Council's Welfare Support team, as part of their remit, will identify any potential entitlements clients may have to these specific payments as well as providing support to make any applications.</p>
Explore options with partnerships to support flexible models of childcare in individual communities	<p><i>Single Care Model</i></p> <p>Focus on the delivery of both adult and child care as a single service in rural and remote locations. This seeks to address care provision across the age spectrum within a rural community where there have been difficulties with recruitment of staff, to provide an integrated care service which can provide child and adult care due to small numbers and ensuring a viable service.</p> <p>CALA have been in progressing discussions with the Care Inspectorate and have set up a workstream to support development and see what elements require further work and flexibility from regulation and legislation. Such a model fits well with the planned changes to SSSC regulations due in the summer 2024 as well as the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan.</p>

Pop Up Play/recruitment

A model of play and recruitment has been developed to address challenges of recruitment into childcare. It has been seen as a positive development, learning from the event included working more closely and at an earlier stage with the local schools and also re establishing relationships with key agencies. Other areas being considered include Ullapool, South Skye and Lochalsh and Caithness. Providing flexible childcare in rural areas is key driver to reducing child poverty through increased parental employment.

Scottish Football Association (SFA)

The SFA were funded by SG to roll out unregulated school aged childcare to test if that is used by families and how it benefits children especially in more deprived areas and those with lower attendance. Work is being progressed to consider whether this can be developed further in Highland. FC Sonas (gaelic football) are running similar sessions in Fort William area and looking to expand this.

Changes to Childminding Models in Rural and Remote Communities:

Work is ongoing to explore:

- Whether childminders could be given financial subsidy to enable sustainability. This would enable a childminder to establish a service where there is a need but not yet at full capacity to be a viable business.
- Whether childminders could be funded for the care of their own and family children. Excluding this is a major barrier in rural and island communities.
- Potential changes to Care Inspection regulations in order to reduce the paperwork, bureaucracy and time taken to become a childminder, or to provide more support to guide childminders through this.

Changes to current rural and remote childcare provision particularly 3rd sector providers:

Next steps are to consider:

- Whether there could be a greater flexibility in the Care Inspectorate's timescales around service development and staffing for childcare in remote rural areas.
- When a Local Authority increases rent on their building stock that a childcare provider is exempt from the increases (this makes the provision unsustainable). For those delivering funded ELC a system is in place that means providers pay the let charges but a reasonable charge.
- The need to look at innovative solutions for managerial expertise in rural communities.
- Minimum qualifications, skills, experience and knowledge for community volunteers to create a flexible care staffbank
- Rural Childcare (Care) Practitioner – a new model which has the nurturing nature of a childminder but also the ability to deliver childcare within the local community (outwith a domestic setting) such as running holiday clubs in the local village hall. Consideration needed to ensure the role is viable and could be salaried/subsidised.

Theme: Income from Social Security and benefits in kind	
Improvement Priority: Maximise uptake of child related social security benefits	
Area for Action	Progress
<p>Maximise uptake of DWP and Social Security Scotland benefits, including those with childcare costs, including outcomes from the Council's Advice & Information contract.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for families to maximise incomes and ensure households are able to access all entitlements continued to be a key focus for partners during 2022/23. • Specialist support is available through the Council's Welfare Team and CAB Highland network and this was promoted through the wider Partnership and directly signposted to individuals and families who would benefit. • Support has been developed in the form of the Money Worries leaflet – available in 6 languages and an easy read version. – Money Matters course and information provided on entitlements through the community group bulletin and this continues to be a key source of support and available on different organisations web and social media platforms and in local premises. • More than 26,000 residents within Highland sought support from welfare services (Council and CAB) during the financial year 2022/23. This generated in excess of 109,000 client contacts seeking advice on a variety of issues including cost of living, welfare, money and housing. • In Highland, financial gains derived for clients during 2022/23, by these welfare services, exceeded £24.3m. • During 2022/23, the Revenues & Business Support section administered welfare payments to vulnerable and marginalised residents which exceeded £60m. These payments were a mixture of regular welfare payments including one-off specific awards towards mitigating cost of living challenges.
<p>Implementation of midwifery financial inclusion pathway</p>	<p>A joint Welfare Advice & Health Partnership (WHAP) was set up in 22/23 to provide access to money and welfare rights advice in health care settings. This is achieved by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices.</p> <p>Midwifery Pathway - The <i>Highland Information Trail</i> has been introduced to guide professionals to resources available to support and improve maternal and child health across Highland. It covers information from both a national and local perspective from pre pregnancy through to the age of five.</p> <p>This includes information and the application process for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Start Grant/Best Start foods • Benefits entitlement

- Early Learning and Childcare entitlement
- @8-12 weeks 'Worrying about money' leaflet and details about the 'Worrying about money' phone app.
- @22 weeks the 'Find help to balance your budget' leaflet

The **Health Visitor's Pathway** continues to develop:

- Health Visitors routinely enquire after money worries as part of the Health Visitor Universal Pathway. If the family disclose a need, a referral to the Welfare Team is offered
- The Worrying About Money leaflet is shared with all families.
- Additional training and resources are now available to health staff e.g. Asking Families About Money Worries – Guidance for Health visitors, Midwives and Family Nurse Partnerships booklet and Child Poverty e-learning course from Public Health Scotland.

Current priorities are:

- Adapt the FI Pathway for families with infants to access emergency formula milk.
- Access to emergency funds for families in remote and rural areas - explore cash first approaches.
- Explore what measures can be put in place to provide assurance on the delivery of the FI Pathway.

GP Pathway - A referral pathway is operating to enable GP practices to refer to the Council's Welfare Team. Welfare advice specialists provide an effective support service on all matters relating to welfare benefits and entitlements. The overall aim of the service is to ensure that the correct amount of benefit is paid at the correct time and to assist with budgeting skills so that households can pay their bills, heat their homes, and have a better quality of life.

WAHP's provide GP practices with specialist welfare advice specialists who can support patients to improve their financial situation. There is a strong correlation between improving people's financial situation and improved health outcomes so supporting patients around financial issues should:

- ensure people are directed to the right support.
- help reduce demand on practice time through practice staff being able to identify patients who would benefit from financial advice during appointments.
- allow GP appointments to be more focused on medical matters.

Section 3: What are we planning to do to address Child Poverty in 2023/24

The actions to address Child Poverty in 2023/24 are outlined below and reflect those agreed as part of the new Integrated Children’s Service’s Plan 2023-2026, where one of the core priorities is Child Poverty. Child Poverty has been a core priority of the Integrated Children’s Service’s Plan since 2021 however the actions identified for the 2023/24 plan reflect the life courses approach taken throughout the whole plan. This reflects a new approach for the child poverty action plan.

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

Theme: Getting Started Pre birth – 5 years			
Improvement priority: We will reduce the financial barriers in order to increase participation, raise aspirations and address the impacts of poverty.			
Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New models piloted • A more sustainable delivery model in place, including a shift in the balance of ELC delivery between LA and PVI providers. 	March 2026	Regional Economic Partnership – Childcare Sub-group
Implement the Whole Family Approach to mitigate the impacts of poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling out toolkit for infant food insecurity • Building linkages between schools and local food provision • Pilot service to person approaches within local areas 	March 2026	Integrated Children’s Services Board
Develop financial inclusion pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of service areas operating a financial inclusion pathway 	March 2025	Head of Revenues and Business Support, Highland Council

Theme: Growing Up – Primary Years			
Improvement priority: Mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis			
Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Increase the uptake of sanitary products in schools	Increase in product take-up from young people	August 2025	Children's Rights and Participation Group
Develop system for weekend food support	Year 1: Options for delivery of support explored	March 2025	Poverty Reduction Delivery Group
Roll out cost of the school day toolkit	Increase in take up of schools using the toolkit	August 2025	Head of Lifelong Learning and Gaelic

Theme: Moving On: Secondary and Young Adulthood			
Improvement priority: We will raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap			
Actions	Measures / evaluation	Timescale	Lead
Raise awareness of the impact of poverty amongst children and young people	Baseline – Lifestyle Survey	March 2026	Poverty Reduction Delivery Group
Roll out the Family First approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce numbers of children in external residential provision • Increase proportion of children in kinship care • Increased number of foster carers • Increased community services and supports 	March 2026	Head of Children, Young People and Families
Identify way to provided targeted support within universal services.	To be developed	Aug 2023	Poverty Reduction Delivery Group