

Item: 19

General Meeting of the Council: 9 December 2025.

Local Child Poverty Action Report.

**Joint Report by Chief Officer, Orkney Health and Social Care
Partnership and Director of Education, Communities and Housing.**

1. Overview

- 1.1. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities and health boards in Scotland to report annually on activity they are taking, and will take, to reduce child poverty.
- 1.2. Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs) must be submitted to the Scottish Government as soon as practicable following the end of the reporting year.
- 1.3. The Child Poverty Task Force has published six LCPARs for Orkney, with the seventh, for 2024 – 25, attached in draft as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 1.4. Monitoring and reporting of co-ordinated action to address child poverty in Orkney, including the compilation of the LCPAR 2024-25, is currently undertaken by the Orkney Partnership's Cost of Living Task Force.
- 1.5. The draft LCPAR 2024-25 is currently in circulation for consideration by partner agencies and will be submitted for final approval to the Orkney Partnership Board prior to submission to the Scottish Government.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:
 - i. Approve the Local Child Poverty Action Report 2024 - 25, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, for submission to the Scottish Government, in so far as it relates to the remit of the Council.

For Further Information please contact:

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Implications of Report

1. **Financial** - There are no financial implications for the Council arising directly from this report. Any actions arising from the Action Report should be met from within approved budgets.
2. **Legal** - There are no legal implications for the Council contained in this report.
3. **Corporate Governance** – Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** - None.
5. **Equalities** - An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for performance monitoring.
6. **Island Communities Impact** - An Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required for performance monitoring.
7. **Links to Council Plan** - The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
 - ☐ Growing our economy.
 - ☐ Strengthening our Communities.
 - ☐ Developing our Infrastructure.
 - ☒ Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan** - The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
 - ☒ Cost of Living.
 - ☐ Sustainable Development.
 - ☐ Local Equality.
 - ☐ Improving Population Health.
9. **Environmental and Climate Risk** - none.
10. **Risk** - None.
11. **Procurement** - None.
12. **Health and Safety** - None.
13. **Property and Assets** - None.
14. **Information Technology** - None.
15. **Cost of Living** - The recommendations in this report contribute directly to the mitigation of the impact on individuals, families, and communities of the cost of living.

List of Background Papers

None.

Appendix

Appendix 1: The Orkney Partnership DRAFT Local Child Poverty Annual Report 2024/25.



Local Child Poverty Action Report 2024 - 2025



**Orkney
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Introduction

Local authorities and health boards in Scotland have a statutory requirement to report on child poverty. In Orkney, we choose to tackle this issue jointly as the Orkney Partnership, producing an annual *Local Child Poverty Action Report* with our partner agencies. The Cost of Living Task Force is a sub-group of the Orkney Partnership that leads on the child poverty work.

The cost of living crisis is the most severe economic crisis in a generation, and it is disproportionately affecting those in rural areas like Orkney. In 2021, the Scottish Government estimated that the minimum cost of living in remote rural Scotland was between 15% - 30% higher than in urban parts of the UK.

Last year, we included in this report a survey that showed that the majority of Orcadian children are feeling the consequences of the cost of living crisis either at home, or through changes in their community. Children were increasingly reporting feeling cold in their houses and having to change purchasing habits to accommodate the rising prices. This year, we include a brief overview of larger discussions on child poverty in Orkney. This section was informed by *Orkney Matters 2*, a community consultation project which took the conversation out to different isles and parishes. Tackling child poverty is no longer an exercise in prevention, but one of mitigation. Ensuring that children can live comfortable, normal lives is a goal that requires urgent action.

National figures included in this report show that Orkney has an estimated 757 children living in poverty, after housing costs. This is an overall decrease in the past five years.

Thank you for your interest in our report.



Future of this Report

This 2024 – 2025 report is the final in the 2022 - 2026 reporting window. Starting from next year, the aim is to include the Local Child Poverty Strategy within the Children's Services Strategy. This has two major benefits:

1. It centres the issue of child poverty within the larger Children's Services Strategy, bringing more focus and attention to this important and worthwhile work.
2. It reduces the amount of duplication between reports and strategies, streamlining the reporting process which allows partners to dedicate more time to carrying out the content of the report.

As this strategy is included within the larger Children's Services Strategy, the annual report on child poverty will be within the Children's Services Annual Report. Both documents span the same reporting period and will be incorporated with each other.

Reporting on Child Poverty in Orkney

Reporting on child poverty in Orkney is hindered by the relatively small size of our dataset compared to other local authorities. The data is, at times, so granular that it cannot be published to protect the anonymity of the child in question.

The Orkney Child Poverty Strategy 2022 – 2026 used figures from the UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to understand the percentage of children living in absolute and relative poverty in Orkney.

The terms absolute and relative poverty come from the DWP with absolute poverty measuring whether those in the lowest income households are seeing their incomes rise in real terms, and relative poverty measuring whether those in the lowest income households are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole.

Relative Poverty

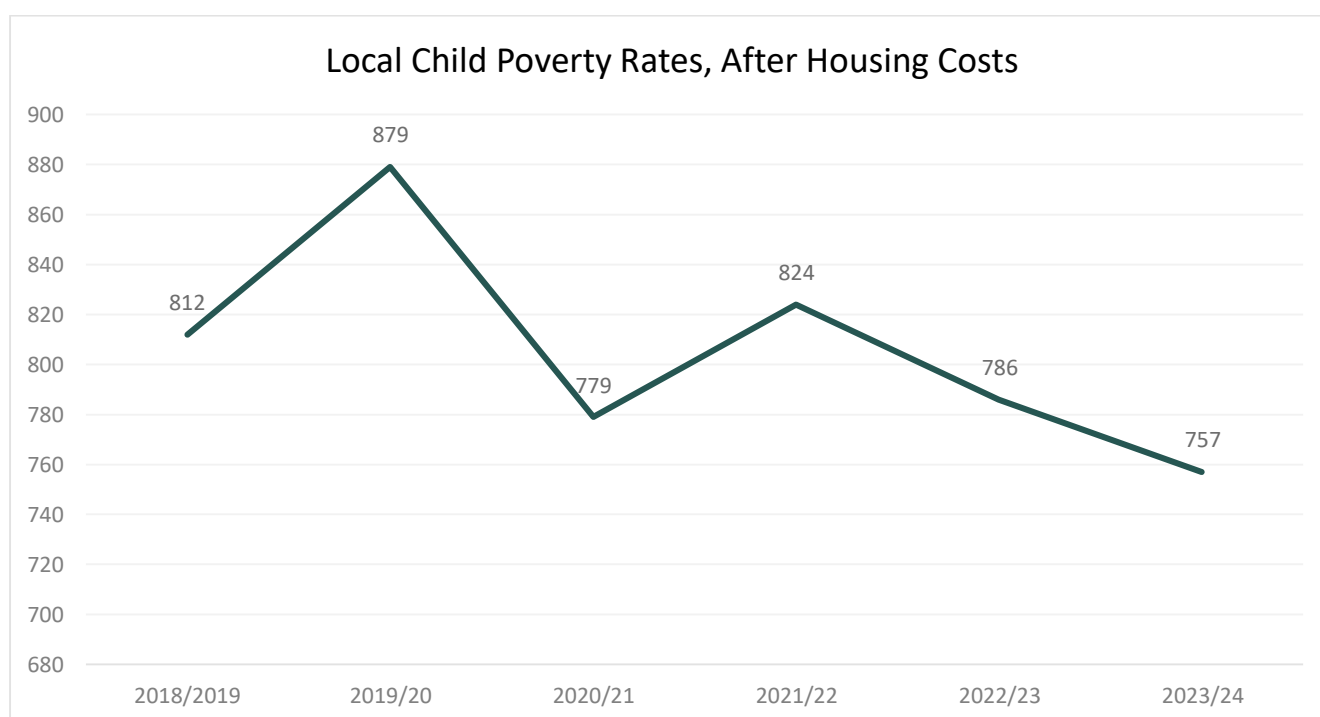
Children in families with incomes less than 60% of the contemporary UK median income

Absolute Poverty

Children in families with incomes less than 60% of inflation adjusted 2010 – 2011 median income

The Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough has developed new estimates of child poverty at local levels factoring in housing costs. This revised methodology means that child poverty figures from 2023 – 2024 and onwards cannot be compared to previous years estimates included in past LCPARs. The Scottish Government recommends that ‘while the previously published time series from 2014 – 2015 to 2022 – 2023 can still be used to look at trends over time there is an inherent level of uncertainty associated with the modelling approach which is difficult to quantify... year on year rates of change observed in specific locations need to be treated with some caution.’

This graph shows the current estimate of child poverty in Orkney using the revised methodology:



Fuel Poverty

As explained in previous LCPARs, the DWP calculation of relative and absolute poverty does not account for the higher cost of living in rural island areas, nor the impact on fuel costs living in an exposed windy region. This is true for the new figures.

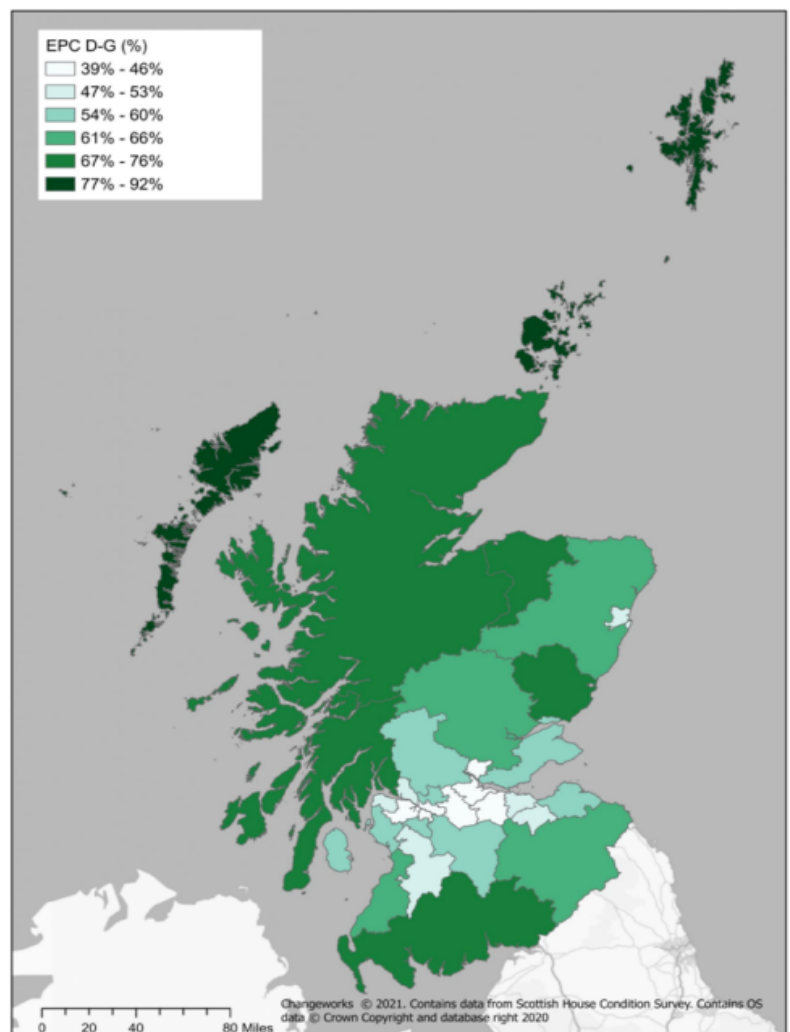
The Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019 define a household as being in fuel poverty “if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, total fuel costs necessary for the home are more than 10% of the household’s adjusted net income (i.e. after housing costs), and if after deducting those fuel costs, benefits received for a care need or disability and childcare costs, the households remaining adjusted net income is insufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living”.

In 2017 - 2019, 30.5% of Orkney households were in fuel poverty compared with a Scottish average of 24.4%. Out of 32 Local Authority areas Orkney had the seventh highest rates of fuel poverty in Scotland and second highest rates of extreme fuel poverty. Since then, the Scottish average has climbed to 31%, and we can assume that there has been a comparable increase in Orcadian households in this time frame.

Orkney is not connected to the UK mainland gas grid, therefore people living in Orkney (Oradians) must use more expensive forms of fuel to heat their homes. This results in higher standing charges, with households spending more than their urban equivalent households for the same energy usage. Orcadians either use more expensive electricity to heat their homes, or are reliant on unregulated fuels including oil, LPG, and solid fuels. Due to the unregulated market for these fuels, there are fewer protections for householders. Additionally, a greater proportion of households on Orkney use restricted meter tariffs which limit customers' ability to switch to more competitive rates.

In Orkney high fuel poverty rates are also driven by the poor energy efficiency of homes, as poorly insulated properties require greater fuel consumption to maintain comfortable temperatures. The Changeworks map shows the high proportion of dwellings in Orkney that have the poorest Energy Performance Certificate rating of D – G.

Orkney Islands Council has produced a Fuel Poverty strategy a part of the larger Local Housing Strategy. This document created five key actions to battle high fuel poverty rates:



- Lobbying Scottish and UK governments on the unfair tariffs experience in Orkney.
- Undertaking further analysis of fuel poverty at a lower Orkney Islands geographic area, with annual monitoring and review to enable more targeted action.
- Review information and advice provision for individual households and private landlords on fuel poverty and energy efficiency particularly in areas where fuel poverty is more prevalent.
- Develop a housing net-zero plan for implementation across tenure including taking opportunities for additional funding.
- Work with schools, universities, HIE and local contractors to promote careers and develop the local workforce in repairs, maintenance and energy efficiency works including accreditation in the insulation sector (across housing sectors).

Each of these actions are included in the Local Housing Action Plan with targets and timescales assigned.

Child Health Indicators

Poverty impacts on children's health, and problems can persist for a lifetime. In previous Action Reports we have monitored a selection of the child health indicators published by Public Health Scotland to see how the health of Orcadian children compares with the Scottish average.

Please note that, due to Orkney's small population, these figures are prone to a high degree of fluctuation. For example, the fourth indicator 'alcohol-related hospital admissions, age 11 – 25) has a rate of 319 per 100,000 admissions, which translates to just nine admissions. Because of this, numbers can fluctuate year-on-year.

Below is a table of Public Health Scotland health indicators for Orkney. In column five, where we have improved from the previous reporting period, the cell has been filled green for ease of understanding:

ScotPHO Health Indicator	Reporting period	Orkney figures	Scotland figures	How did we do compared to previous reporting period?
Healthy Birth Weight 3 year rolling average	2021/22 – 2023/24	73.2 % (of babies born at a healthy weight)	80.9%	Increased 0.3%
Child Healthy weight in Primary 1 Percentage of children in P1 whose BMI is within the healthy reference range for age and sex	2023/24	67.9% (of P1 children whose BMI is within the healthy reference range for age and sex)	76.5%	Decreased 5%
Drug-related hospital admissions, age 11 – 25 3 year rolling average age/sex standardised rate per 100,000	2021/22 – 2023/24	159.6 (rate per 100,000 admissions)	114.7	Decreased by 76.4 per 100,000
Alcohol related hospital admissions, age 11 – 25 Age/sex standardised rate per 100,000	2021/22 – 2023/24	319 (rate per 100,000 admissions)	182.6	Decreased by 75 per 100,000

ScotPHO Health Indicator	Reporting period	Orkney figures	Scotland figures	How did we do compared to previous reporting period?
Young people admitted to hospital due to assault, age 15 – 25 Age/sex standardised rate per 100,000	2021/22 - 2023/24	13.2 (rate per 100,000 admissions)	63.8	Decreased by 14.3 per 100,000
Teenage pregnancies 3 year rolling average per 1000 females aged 15 - 19	2021/22 – 2023/24	17.1 (rate per 1,000 females aged 15 – 19)	23.6	Increased by 0.3%
Child dental health in Primary 1 Percentage of P1 children with no obvious signs of tooth decay	2023/24 school year	83.9% (of P1 children with no obvious signs of tooth decay)	73.9%	Increased by 2%

Orkney Matters 2

Orkney Matters was a community consultation project carried out in May – October 2024, with conversation topics driven by the general public. The Cost-Of-Living Crisis featured Economic strain and rising costs: everyday items and service prices are rising, with wages not keeping up with these increases.

- **Impact on daily life and choice:** individual habits are changing due to the availability and cost of childcare, and the necessity to ‘shop around’ for better prices.
- **Energy and Fuel Poverty:** In line with the above data on fuel poverty in Orkney, residents in Holm and Kirkwall noted they are struggling with high energy and fuel costs
- **Community support and services:** The importance of community support services was acknowledged, with foodbanks being well-used but stigmatised making some people reluctant to seek help.
- **Housing and property costs:** the rising costs of building and maintaining property were discussed, highlighting the broader impact on housing affordability and the financial burden of property upkeep.
- **Job Availability:** The Army Cadets (who range in age from 12 – 18 years old) were concerned there are not enough career options for them.

What we do in Orkney to combat child poverty

All support agencies in Orkney refer families to partner agencies where they might be able to provide additional services, resources, or assistance to a family.

The summary table below lists the actions which partner agencies routinely carry out to combat child poverty in the community. The majority of these actions are rolling and are continued on from one year to another.

Actions to combat child poverty		Partner agency
1	Advocacy services commissioned by NHS Orkney and Orkney Islands Council	CAB Orkney
2	Maximise income by assisting clients to identify and claim their full financial entitlements	CAB Orkney
3	Parent Employability Support for individuals and families to access information, support, welfare, training, and employment	OIC (CLDE)
4	Providing and encouraging take-up of free school meals and associated clothing allowances and support grants	OIC (School Catering), OHAC
5	Regular discussions with families about finances, debt, benefits etc. Financial support provided and referrals made to CAB for benefit checks/money advice for those in financial difficulties	OHAC (Social Work); OIC (Housing); OIC (CLDE)
6	Support with Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grant applications, and administering funds	OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services, Halls of Residence, and appointed agents); OIC (Revenues and Benefits)
7	Support for individuals and families to manage relationships, improve mental health and reduce substance use plus onward referrals to other services e.g. CAB, Women's Aid	Relationships Scotland – Orkney
8	Support for women and children affected by domestic abuse	Women's Aid Orkney
9	Sourcing funding (local and national) to assist families to purchase items, e.g. bicycles	OHAC (occupational therapists, health visitors)

	Actions to combat child poverty	Partner agency
10	Assisting families to apply for Best Start grants	Social Security Scotland, OHAC (Social Work)
11	Financial support for local children in need, including the following grant schemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Orkney Fund - Bairns Need Nappies - Help from Home - Every Child Should be Warm in Bed - Every Child Deserves a Christmas - Winter Coat Fund 	Orkney Charitable Trust
12	Provision of emergency food to families referred by partner agencies	Orkney Foodbank
13	Community Fridges established in Kirkwall and Stromness to share surplus food donated by retailers and reduce food waste.	Greener Orkney
14	Addressing poor quality housing and fuel poverty through the Home Energy Efficiency Programme for Scotland (HEEPs:Abs) and Landlord Registration	OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services and appointed agents)
15	Providing information and advice on energy efficiency, tariff switching support, assistance with accessing grant funding, advocacy, income maximisation, and budgeting support	THAW Orkney
16	Providing direct support to householders in fuel poverty by means of electricity vouchers, Cosy Home Packs, and small grants	THAW Orkney
17	Electricity top-ups so those in receipt of food parcels can heat/cook their food	Orkney Foodbank THAW Orkney
18	Support for families on low incomes and/or those going through tough times	Homestart Orkney
19	Community larder boxes, pop-up charity shops, fuel voucher schemes etc. Acting as a link between the community and services, including referrals to the Foodbank from the isles	Island Wellbeing Project
20	Enabling digital connectivity and access to Wi-Fi, laptops and other devices for digitally excluded children and families	OIC (CLDE); OHAC (Health Visitors,

Actions to combat child poverty		Partner agency
		School Health, Paediatric therapists)
21	Provision and promotion of free period products available locally, a new online ordering system was piloted during 2021-22	OIC (Building Cleaning) OHAC (Health Visitors, School Health)
22	Administration of capital grants for clients in financial insecurity for debt and large bills through Orkney Money Matters	THAW
23	Supported employment and skills development for adults and young people with a barrier to maintaining employment. Restart Orkney recycles, restores, and sells second-hand furniture and household items and supports new tenants to furnish their property	Employability Orkney with funding and support from OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services)
24	Funding for starter-packs of essential household items	OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services)
25	Housing support for vulnerable families.	OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services, Halls of Residence)
26	Ad hoc essential clothing items for Papdale Halls of Residence pupils	Papdale Hall of Residence staff
27	Larger grants for property repairs and upgrades to gap-fill national energy efficiency grant funding	THAW
28	Distribution of Scottish Government baby boxes to all families with new babies, containing items needed in the first six months	OHAC (Maternity Unit)
29	Support for pregnant women and families with babies and young children	OHAC (Maternity Unit)
30	Hungry Baby service - baby milk, baby food, nappies etc (referred to Health Visitors where child/children under 2 years)	Orkney Foodbank
31	Childsmile - improving children's oral health	OHAC (Dental and Oral Health)

	Actions to combat child poverty	Partner agency
32	Provision of an informal learning programme for young people transitioning out of school	Voluntary Action Orkney (The Connect Project)
33	Supporting the Active Schools Network to increase the number of opportunities for all children to get engaged in sport	OIC & SportScotland
34	ActiveLife Budget Membership scheme offering unlimited access to The Pickaquoy Centre and 11 Council-owned fitness facilities across the islands	OIC & The Pickaquoy Centre
35	Supported Accommodation for homeless young people is provided by the Council in Kirkwall and Stromness. Residents are supported Y People to learn independent living skills, enabling them to sustain a tenancy in the future	Y People; OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services)
36	Provision of school uniform, toiletries, and laundry items	OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services)
37	Facilitation of Young Scot cards, Youth Achievement Groups and the Orkney Youth Forum	OIC (CLDE)
38	Supporting vulnerable young adults to build confidence and positive relationships while focusing on life and employability skills	Voluntary Action Orkney (The Connect Project)
39	Developing new ways of working (via telephone and online) to engage with service users and deliver services safely	OHAC & OIC (Housing Service)
40	Moratorium on increase of rents within emergency housing	OHAC & OIC (Housing and Homelessness Services)
41	Explore options to ensure dental and wider health services are accessible without barriers of finance	Orkney Partnership Board
42	Money Counts – publication of “Worrying about Money?” leaflet and training for support agencies	NHS Orkney (Public Health), Orkney CAB, Social Security Scotland
43	Young People’s Befriending Project – supporting children and young people from the ages of 8-18 through the provision of a trained Befriender	Voluntary Action Orkney

Actions to combat child poverty		Partner agency
44	In School Counselling service expanded to make counselling available for all children and young people aged ten and over, both face to face and online	OIC (Schools)
45	The handout of laundry vouchers so families can get bedding and clothes laundered	Orkney Foodbank
46	Provision of necessities for families in need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laundry vouchers - Electricity top-ups - Children's holiday meals - Supermarket gift cards 	Orkney Foodbank
47	Breakfast Clubs for children who would otherwise go without	Orkney Foodbank, Orkney Charitable Trust, Kirkwall Grammar School & Papdale Primary School
48	"A Helping Hand" webpage bringing together sources of help and support for those affected by the cost of living crisis	OIC.

Pockets

“Pockets” is about ensuring people get the benefits they need and are entitled to, supporting people to take up work and working with employers to boost productivity and pay. Longer term, we are interested in exploring social reforms such as Minimum Income Guarantee which could potentially eliminate child poverty for good.

Raise awareness of entitlements and maximise family income

The project commenced in May 2023, and funding has been extended to cover a full year.

There have been multiple successes from the pilot:

- Increased capacity for the delivery partners to deliver vital services and increased engagement across the partnership agencies.
- £100k in Energy Vouchers and £20k in shopping vouchers made available to the community.
- Increased awareness of support beyond the Foodbank such as the SWF Crisis Grants.
- Research, a workshop and action plan developed for Orkney agencies on how to improve take up of the SWF Crisis Grant.

Following partnership discussions, April 2024 saw the start of a new project under the Orkney Money Matters partnership. VAO became the lead partner for the **Cash First** project, funded by the Scottish Government as part of a national programme involving eight local authorities, with THAW Orkney as the main delivery partner supported by CAB, the Blide Trust and the wider Orkney Money Matters partnership organisations.

The aim of this project was to reduce the need for Foodbanks by offering a Cash First option for those experiencing food insecurity. An objective of the project was to provide outreach support to enable the delivery partners to focus on those who historically are harder to reach such as the ferry-linked isles communities. Between April 2024 and October 2025, a number of coordinated outreach events were delivered with the support of this funding.

Adopt a ‘one stop shop’ approach to streamline access to services and new ways to engage

The Orkney Cash First project, which included up to £90,000 for a flexible cash fund between April 2024 and October 2025, also developed an online referral system, currently administered by THAW Orkney. The system has been successfully rolled out to the main delivery partners of the Cash First project and supports a more streamlined experience when accessing support and services, with emphasis on a “no wrong door” approach which included setting cash payments to Minimum Income Standard.

There was also additional support for isles with a Remote Rural Scotland uplift, which significantly increased support for families as payments were dependent upon household type.

An evaluation of the project will begin towards the end of October 2025 which will provide insights into the successes and challenges of the system and will support the Orkney Money Matters partnership to decide how to manage the system in the future to ensure its sustainability.

Explore with Scottish Government to scope for piloting Minimum Income Guarantee

In June 2025, the Scottish Government published the *Minimum Income Guarantee: A Roadmap to Dignity for All*. This report included an overall timeline and roadmap for the introduction of the minimum income guarantee in Scotland. The roadmap is split into three sections:

1. Building the Guarantee (2026 – 2031)
2. Creating a Fairer Scotland (2031 – 2036)
3. Realising Our Collective Ambition (Longer term goals of what can be achieved beyond 2036).

The final step in Section One is the piloting of a minimum income guarantee. This pilot would be based around a specific population group (for example, unpaid carers) rather than around a geographical area like Orkney.

Prospects

“Prospects” aims to improve the life chances of children, enabling them to escape poverty in a sustainable way. This includes supporting child development and educational achievement, supporting families through crisis and encouraging employers to provide family-friendly jobs and opportunities to progress.

Remove barriers to participation in school trips and experiences

This work is being headed by the Council's Education Service, Parent's Councils, Island Development Trusts, and the Orkney Charitable Trust.

School/establishment managers were asked to review the impact of the 'cost of the school day' as part of a briefing in December 2022. There has been a specific focus on using local facilities for outdoor education programmes during 2022- 23, in recognition that these can remove barriers to participation, including making the experience more affordable. Where approval has been given for other trips, establishment managers are asked to ensure, through positive engagement with the wider community, that cost is not a barrier.

Orkney Charitable Trust partnered with Papdale Parent Council to set up a fund to enable children to participate in activities at Papdale School which their families would otherwise be unable to afford. Since the fund was set up, it has helped parents with school photographs, a verruca sock for swimming, reading overlays, ear defenders, and travel to school activities. The fund is available to any child, regardless of whether they are registered for free school meals. Education Scotland inspected Papdale Primary School and reported in June 2023: "The Parent Council provide a well-considered participation fund. This offers funding to ensure all children can access learning experiences and opportunities without families incurring additional financial costs."

This was a short-term goal, completed in 2023.

Improve take-up of free school meals and associated benefits

The Council's Schools Catering Service, together with Orkney Health and Care, are leading on this aim.

Money is sourced from Free School Meals and clothing grants are funded by the Scottish Government. Orkney Islands Council pays additional holiday grants to qualifying families to encourage take-up.

Uptake of free school meals was actively promoted in schools and the community, linking this to the payments being made for Christmas from Scottish Government and the Council.

This was a short-term goal, completed in 2023. During 2022-23, 1,733 children in Orkney were eligible for free school meals, but we do not at present record how many of these were taken up. The approach to lunchtime in nursery settings has been revised to enable children to be more independent in making food choices, which encourages the uptake of free nursery meals.

Remove barriers to participation in family leisure/holiday activities

The Pickaquoy Centre and the Council offer budget membership to their joint ActiveLife scheme at a cost of £1 per person per activity, with no up-front subscription cost. The decision was taken at the beginning of the 2024 financial year to increase the price from 50 pence to £1, which was the first price increase to ActiveLife Budget since 2017 and reflect the increased running costs of the Centre.

In 2023-24, 831 Orkney residents took out or renewed a Budget Membership to ActiveLife. An increase of 32% year-on-year.

Places

The places where people live shape their lives, affecting their job prospects and access to essential goods, services and housing. Policies designed to regenerate communities must address transport availability and accessibility as well as the quality and affordability of housing. We must also take account of the need for a “Just Transition” to net zero, ensuring that the impacts of climate change do not add to poverty and disadvantage in particular places.

Improve the energy efficiency of new/existing housing in private and social rented sectors

This work is headed up by the Council’s Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation service, in partnership with OHAL.

Energy efficiency upgrades on social rented housing are funded by the Housing Revenue Account (tenants’ rents). Across Scotland, issues are being raised around the ethics of asking the poorest members of society to fund these huge costs and we hope that some Government funding may follow. Private sector homeowners can access the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area-Based Scheme (HEES ABS), available in Orkney through Warmworks, which is means tested. Warmworks will undertake an assessment of their property and give advice as to what their entitlement may be, together with any contribution needed from the householder themselves. In 2022-23, the Council received approximately £2m HEES ABS funding.

This action is being followed through in the Council's statutory Fuel Poverty Strategy, Heat Strategy and Energy Efficiency Strategy, all of which are either in development or completed. The Council and OHAL are waiting for Scottish Government to confirm guidance on the energy efficiency standards they need to work to. For new build, that is determined by existing building standards that housebuilders are obliged to follow, and the Council and OHAL both currently work to the Silver Standard. The focus will be on existing properties, with timescales to be reviewed once the Fuel Poverty Strategy is in place. Work is going on in the background, including pilot projects, and carrying out works that will be monitored. Once the plans are in place, this preliminary work will be followed up by larger programmes.

OIC has created the fuel poverty strategy, which is incorporated into the Local Housing Strategy.

Extend more employment opportunities to the isles

This work is being led by the Orkney Partnership’s Local Equality Delivery Group, which includes representatives from isles development trusts, community councils, elected members and other key community planning partners.

The Local Employability Partnership and Strategic Community Learning Group are managed by the Council's Community Learning, Development and Employability team. This partnership encourages partners to provide work-based learning opportunities on the isles. During 2022-23, the Strategic Community Learning Group awarded £4,000 of Community

Based Adult Learning funding to Westray Learning Centre to help develop their learning/work hub. Following the launch of the Orkney Community Plan 2023-30, this action has been adopted by the Local Equality Delivery Group, which will progress it via Orkney's new Locality Plan.

Explore options to apply the benefits from wind power developments to reduce home energy costs

This work is led by the Council's Enterprise and Economic Growth Service.

Orkney's Community Wind Farm Project encompasses three 28.8MW, six turbine, wind farm developments at Quanterness in St Ola, at Wee Fea in Hoy and on Faray in the North Isles. All three sites have now received planning permission. In March 2023, the UK's energy regulator, Ofgem, announced a 'minded-to' position to approve the request to install a 220MW inter-connector cable from Orkney to the Scottish mainland, which will help employment and income remain in the county. This work is now in progress.

The project is forecast to generate around £6m profit per annum, as well as £432,000 a year in community benefits which the Council has already agreed would be paid to community councils. The Council has yet to decide how the majority of the income from the scheme would be allocated, but one consideration would certainly be the mitigation of local fuel poverty. Decisions are not expected soon as the new turbines are not anticipated to start generating until 2027 at the earliest.

Prevention

Almost anyone can experience poverty during their lifetime, so policies that protect against poverty are important. Unemployment, illness or relationship breakdown can strike at any time. Once in poverty, it is difficult to escape, and hardship can persist for generations.

Promote good employment practices, flexibility and fair pay, and their benefits to employers.

This section is led by the Council's Community Learning, Development and Employability team on behalf of Orkney's Local Employability Partnership.

During 2022-23, a campaign was conducted to promote employment rights, fair pay and conditions, and Scottish Living Wage accreditation. The Employment Rights & Responsibilities media campaign was followed up by the creation of a Your Rights Booklet, to be distributed through the Local Employability Partnership. The booklet includes a QR code which directs people to CAB Orkney and ACAS. Posters have been produced for circulation within prominent employment premises. The LEP has developed an employers' information and resource toolkit relating to employment rights and employer responsibilities, which was launched at an employer engagement event at the new Employability Hub in March 2023. In 2022-23 twelve Employer Recruitment Incentives were negotiated and administered across a range of private and third sector organisations in Orkney. Six young people (aged 16–24) and six people aged 25 + were employed, of whom eleven (91%) remain in fair and sustainable work.

In 2023 – 24, major steps were taken by partners to move towards real living wage accreditation. Both OIC and VAO have either achieved real living wage accreditation or are in the process of doing so. The Community Wealth Building subgroup has met with members of Living Wage Scotland to better understand the process of becoming accredited for both real living wage and real living hours, and how to help our private sector partners to seek accreditation.

Increase the capacity of Orkney's advisory agencies

THAW is working on accessing more funds for housing improvement to ensure that more housing assets are improved in the community for a longer-term impact. As part of this work, it has raised £200k for repairs to isles properties, which will be accompanied by developing improved assessments and advice around housing condition, prior to energy efficiency upgrades.

Explore people-centred strategies for local development such as Community Wealth Building

Community wealth building (CWB) is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which seeks to direct wealth back into the local economy and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. It can be described as an approach that does not redistribute wealth but pre-distributes wealth. Integral to CWB is support for small and medium sized local businesses, including cooperatives and social enterprises, upskilling people to access new opportunities and fairer employment practices, all of which support wages and reduce poverty.

Many agencies in Orkney already implement policies which embody CWB principles, for example the Council's Sustainable Procurement Policy which enables small local suppliers to bid for school meal contracts, the Business Improvement District in Kirkwall, and locally owned wind turbine developments. In February 2023, the Partnership held a workshop to consider the scope for CWB to add value to local development plans and initiatives. Potentially, CWB might also help to resolve such longstanding issues as market failure in the meat supply chain, residential care, and nursery provision. CWB has since been adopted as a guiding principle in both the Orkney Community Plan 2023-30 and the Council Plan 2023-28.

Priorities

The Scottish Government has identified six types of family which are more likely than others to experience poverty:

- Lone parent families
- Families with an adult or child with disabilities
 - Families with 3 or more children
 - Minority ethnic families
- Families with the youngest child aged less than 1
 - Families with a mother aged under 25

Orkney's Child Poverty Strategy recognises two additional local groups at higher risk of hardship:

- Families with experience of the care system.
- Residents of the ferry-linked isles.

Make inter-island ferry travel affordable to children and families on the ferry-linked isles.

On 31 January 2022, the Scottish Government's Young Persons' Free Bus Scheme came into effect and everyone in Scotland who is under 22 or a full-time student can have their National Entitlement Card updated to permit free bus travel everywhere in Scotland. But in Orkney, our buses may actually be ferries, and the Council has been successfully lobbied the Scottish Government to extend the scheme to include free ferry fares.

The Community Learning, Development and Employability team are in discussion with National Youth Agency officials including Young Scot, Youth Link, and the Children's Commissioner. A Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP) for Orkney was invited to the Scottish Parliament's Net Zero Energy and Transport Committee where they raised the importance of free ferry travel on islands in line with free bus travel in rural areas.

Meanwhile, the Schools team has been actively promoting the online application process to Orkney's under 22-year-olds to maximise uptake.

During 2022-23, Orkney Ferries fares were frozen at the reduced rates implemented in June 2021, when adult passenger and vehicle fares were cut by 38%. The rates were frozen again in June 2023 to last until spring 2024, in line with Orkney's external ferry services. A 25% discount applies for elderly and disabled passengers and 50% for under 22s. Children under 5 do not need a card and already travel free on buses and ferries.

The cost of travel by ferry to attend medical and dental appointments has been considered before by the Partnership, without a resolution, and will be looked at further by the Cost of Living Task Force. Increasingly, NHS advice is now available digitally via their virtual consultation system "Near Me", but for many types of care (such as dentistry) there is no alternative to a face-to-face appointment and a lengthy journey which to some is unaffordable.

Improve the availability and affordability of wraparound childcare/after-school provision

During 2022-23, the Council was awarded £1.5m from the Scottish Government's Islands Infrastructure Fund (part of the Islands Programme supporting the National Islands Plan) towards the total project cost of £2.52m for a new nursery in Kirkwall, with the remainder being funded by the Council.

Orkney Islands Council has built a new nursery premises to accommodate the council-run Willow Tree Nursery. Plans were approved for a 51-place nursery to be built adjacent to Orkney College, facilitating future training and practical experience in early learning and childcare for college students. The construction contract was awarded in March 2023 to local firm Orkney Builders Ltd. During 2022-23, CLD Employability Services ran a Childminding qualification and training course for 10 individuals. There are now 6 additional newly qualified childminders offering childcare provision across Orkney.

The Partnership has been involved in talks at a national level on how childcare provision is a necessity in rural areas.

Prioritise early financial support for families at risk, to avert crisis and family breakdown

Financial stressors are discussed with families during the initial assessment period. The team helps to optimise the financial benefits available to families at risk, provides referrals to Orkney Foodbank and has partnered with Orkney Charitable Trust, who offer grants for household goods, white goods, and financial support. Team meetings have included reflective discussions on the impact of the cost of living crisis and associated stressors for Orkney's children and families, particularly families in crisis and those going through the child protection process.