

Item: 4

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 31 March 2021.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To scrutinise service performance against relevant indicators within the Local Government Benchmarking Framework for 2019/20, which fall under the remit of the Education, Leisure and Housing Service.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to scrutinise:

2.1.

The performance of the Education, Leisure and Housing Service against the Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators for 2019/20, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3. Background

3.1.

The Council has been reporting performance information in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) since 2010/11. This is a statutory function of Scottish local government.

3.2.

The Improvement Service – the national improvement service for local government in Scotland – co-ordinates and facilitates the LGBF process. Some indicators are reported directly to the Improvement Service, with data for other indicators being gathered by the Improvement Service from various sources, to which all local authorities make annual returns.

3.3.

LGBF data is published annually by the Improvement Service in its National Benchmarking Overview Report, although it is almost one year out-of-date at the time of publication. The 2019/20 report was published on 26 February 2021.

4. Response to the Best Value Assurance Report 2017

4.1.

Although the Council has reported its performance against the LGBF requirements for several years, primarily through its Annual Performance Report, on 17 April 2018, the Policy and Resources Committee recommended that, from 2019, this information would also be reported to Service Committees for scrutiny.

4.2.

This commitment is part of the Council's response to recommendations in the Best Value Assurance Report, which was published in December 2017. This has subsequently been incorporated into the Council Delivery Plan 2018 to 2023.

5. Performance

5.1.

Appendix 1 sets out the performance against the Local Government Benchmarking indicators in 2019/20 which fall under the remit of the Education, Leisure and Housing Service. This includes comparisons with previous years' performance, the Scottish average, and other local authorities in Orkney's benchmarking 'family groups'. There is also an analysis of performance and comment on any future action for each indicator.

5.2.

For Children's Services and Housing Services' indicators, similar councils are grouped by their level of deprivation. For these indicators Orkney's family group includes:

- East Renfrewshire Council.
- East Dunbartonshire Council.
- Aberdeenshire Council.
- City of Edinburgh Council.
- Perth and Kinross Council.
- Aberdeen City Council.
- Shetland Islands Council.

5.3.

For Culture and Leisure Services, similar councils are grouped by their population density. For these indicators Orkney's family group includes:

- Western Isles Council.
- Argyll and Bute Council.
- Shetland Islands Council.
- Highland Council.

- Borders Council.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council.
- Aberdeenshire Council.

5.4.

It should be noted that the monitoring periods for some of the indicators may differ. For example, most are for 2019/20, but some maybe for 2017 to 2020 or 2016 to 2020. This is because all the indicators are calculated from national figures and are generated by different organisations for different purposes.

5.5.

The 2019/20 data for the following indicators has not yet been published by the Improvement Service, but will be available in Spring 2021:

- CHN11 – percentage of pupils entering positive destinations.
- CHN17 – percentage of children meeting developmental milestones.
- CHN19a – School attendance rates (per 100 pupils).
- CHN19b – School attendance rates (per 100 'looked after children').
- CHN20a – School exclusion rates (per 1,000 pupils).
- CHN20b – School exclusion rates (per 1,000 'looked after children').

6. COVID-19

6.1.

It should be noted that the LGBP reporting period for the year ended 31 March 2020 largely predates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has had a significant impact on services provided by the Council throughout 2020/21. This meant that the Council's performance against the 2018/19 LGBF indicators was not presented to Committee, although a briefing was issued to Elected Members.

6.2.

While the majority of the most recent LGBF data presents the position pre-COVID-19, the 2019/20 educational attainment indicators refer to the academic year which was significantly impacted by the pandemic. For the 2019/20 data, the absence of external assessment information led to grades awarded in 2020 being based on teacher estimates. These results are therefore not directly comparable with previous and future years. Any change between the attainment levels of the 2019/20 cohort and those of previous years should therefore not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or declined without further evidence.

6.3.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following indicators will not be included in this year's publication:

- CHN13a – percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence level in literacy.
- CHN13b – percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence level in numeracy.
- CHN14a – Literacy Attainment Gap (P1,4,7 Combined) – percentage point gap between the least deprived and most deprived pupils.
- CHN14b – Numeracy Attainment Gap (P1,4,7 Combined) – percentage point gap between the least deprived and most deprived pupils.

6.4.

The continuity provided by the LGBF will be invaluable in understanding the long-term impact of COVID-19 on communities and on Council services in future years. It will provide vital intelligence to assist the sector in learning lessons from its response, as well as contributing to strengthening and redesigning services around future policy priorities to support recovery and renewal.

7. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and scrutiny and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

8. Financial Implications

All 32 Scottish Councils pay an annual rate to the Improvement Service for participation in the LGBF. For this, the Improvement Service provides Councils with data services and co-ordination of family group activity. The fee for 2019/20 was £2,516.

9. Legal Aspects

Under section 1(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1992 and in accordance with section 13 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the Council has been directed by the Accounts Commission to report on information drawn from the Local Government Benchmark Framework.

10. Contact Officers

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11. Appendix

Appendix 1: OIC performance against the LGBF indicators in 2019/20.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators 2019 to 2020

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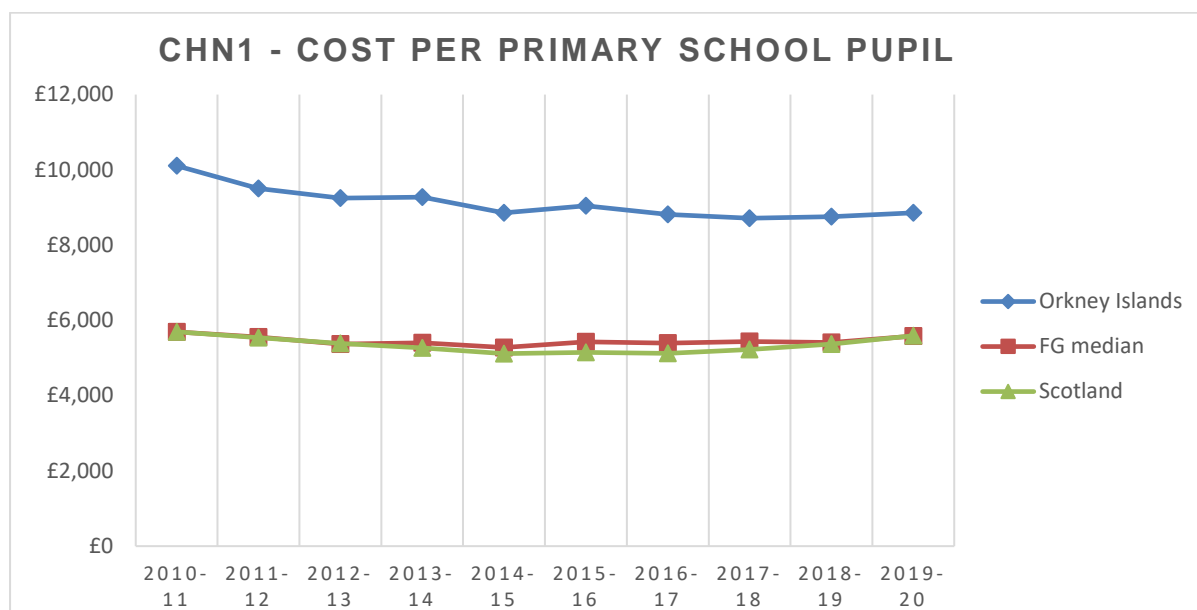
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CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Cost per primary school pupil

In 2019/20, the cost per primary school pupil in Orkney was £8,857, which is more than the 2018/19 figure of £8,754, and significantly more than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £5,595.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils	
2018/19	31
2019/20	31

Performance Analysis

Cost per pupil in the 3 island groups (Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles) are noticeably higher than elsewhere. In part this will be due to the 4%+ uplift per pupil created by the distant islands allowance.

Costs per pupil in Orkney are also higher as a significant number of schools are also community facilities.


In smaller schools (which carry a high percentage of surplus places) the cost per pupil is disproportionately large; in 2018 analysis of the data indicated that the cost per pupil for around 70% of pupils is at least £1,500 lower.

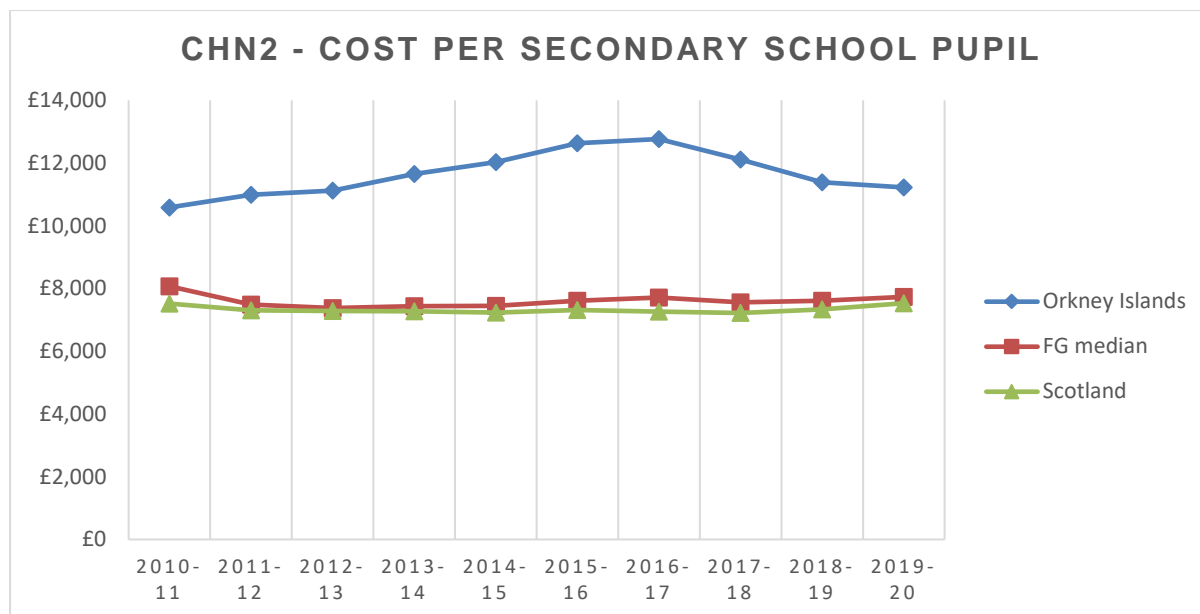
Future Action

Review the financial model for schools and learning across Orkney; consider adoption of nationally agreed staffing ratios across all schools; explore efficiencies within non-frontline support services; delineate non-education costs (e.g. community facilities costs); produce 'cost per place' data to ensure discussions are informed.

Cost per secondary school pupil

In 2019/20, the cost per secondary school pupil in Orkney was £11,219, which is less than the 2018/19 figure of £11,384, but significantly more than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £7,531.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	31	
2019/20	30	



Performance Analysis


Rise in cost per pupil between 2010 and 2017 is in part due to fluctuations in roll and consequently schools carry a disproportionate number of “surplus places”. Increase in roll (particularly at KGS) leads to a small drop in the cost per pupil. Average for Orkney is significantly impacted by junior highs. KGS (as the biggest school) is closer to the national average once the figure has been adjusted to exclude Distant Islands Allowance.

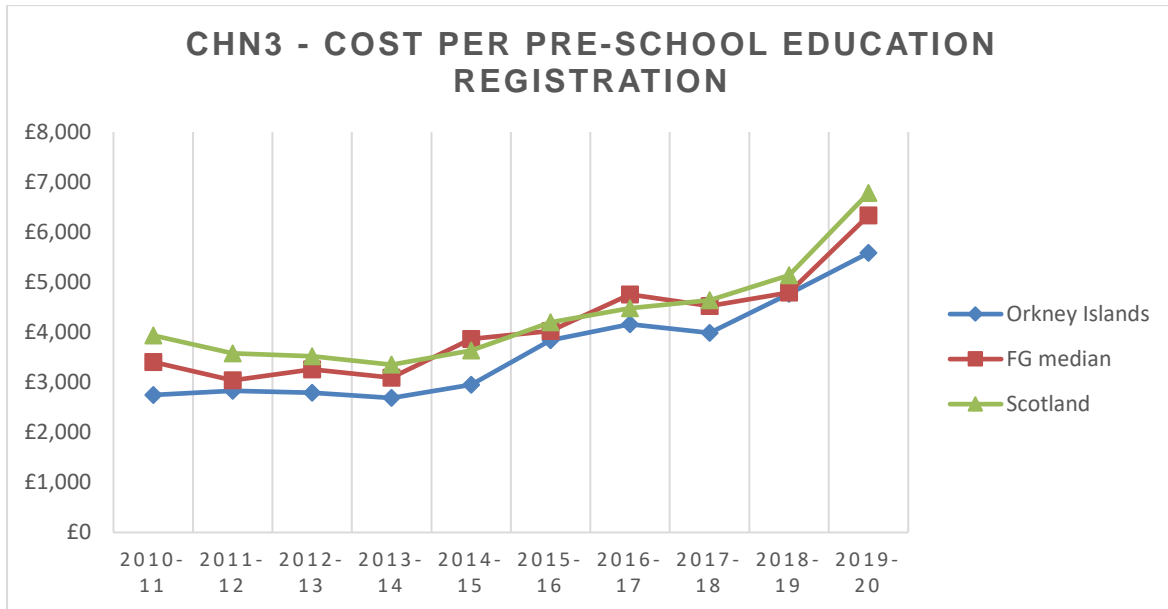
Future Action

(As noted above): Review the financial model for schools and learning across Orkney; consider adoption of nationally agreed staffing ratios across all schools; explore efficiencies within non-frontline support services; delineate non-education costs (e.g. community facilities costs); produce ‘cost per place’ data to ensure discussions are informed.

The cost of pre-school education place

In 2019/20, the cost per pre-school education place in Orkney was £5,585, which is more than the 2018/19 figure of £4,769, but less than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £6,783.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	14	
2019/20	7	



Performance Analysis

The overall increase is in line with expectations linked to the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

With increased accuracy in attributing costs to ELC (rather than primary) the change in relative position is not unexpected (by example this means energy costs and administrative support for ELC provision in school is not captured in the cost per registration figure).


Future Action

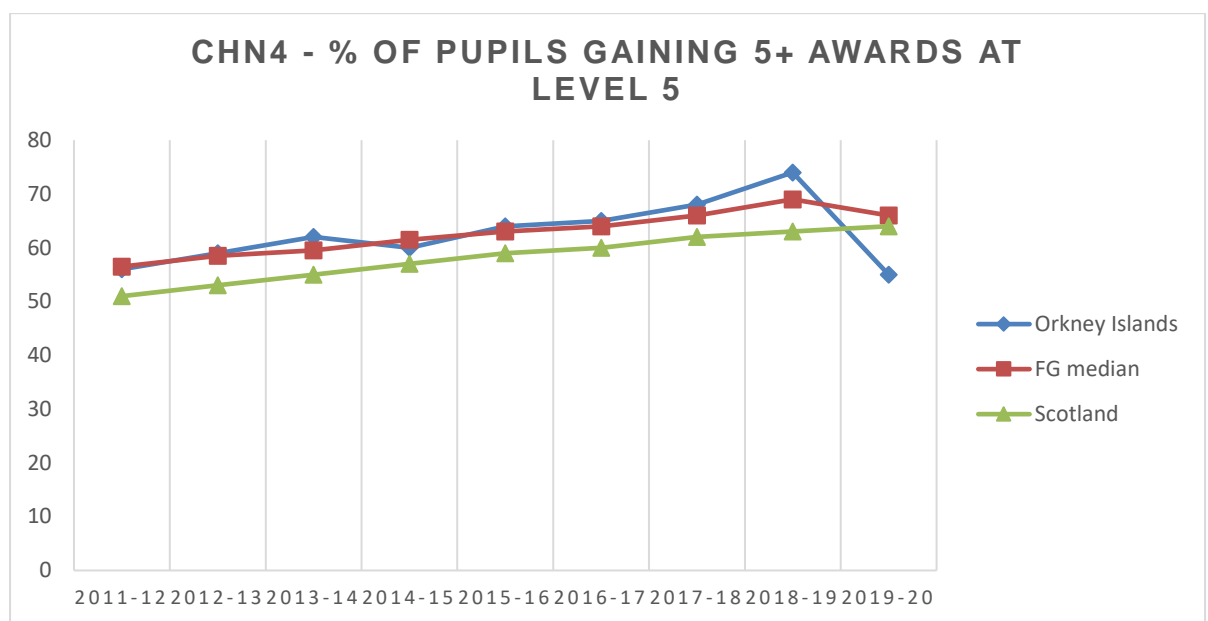
Continue to monitor costs as expansion programme enters final phase. Small settings and Distant Islands Allowance may continue to add to the cost per child.

The following LGBF data in relation to school performance should be read in conjunction with the local authority's attainment review. The attainment review makes use of the data provided through Insight; a tool that permits comparison with both the national data set as well as 'virtual comparators'. For 2020, because of the way in which awards were made, there may be issues with the reliability and validity of some elements of the comparative data.

Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 5

In 2019/20, 55% of secondary pupils in Orkney gained 5+ awards at level 5, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 74%, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 64%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	3	
2019/20	30	



Performance Analysis


Following a very positive period up to 2019, 2020 show a significant drop in the % of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 5. The analysis tool used by schools and local authorities reveals a slightly different analysis (2019 = 67% and 2020 = 69%), which is more reassuring. Figures are influenced by the number of leavers as well as the number of subjects being taken at S4. In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort.

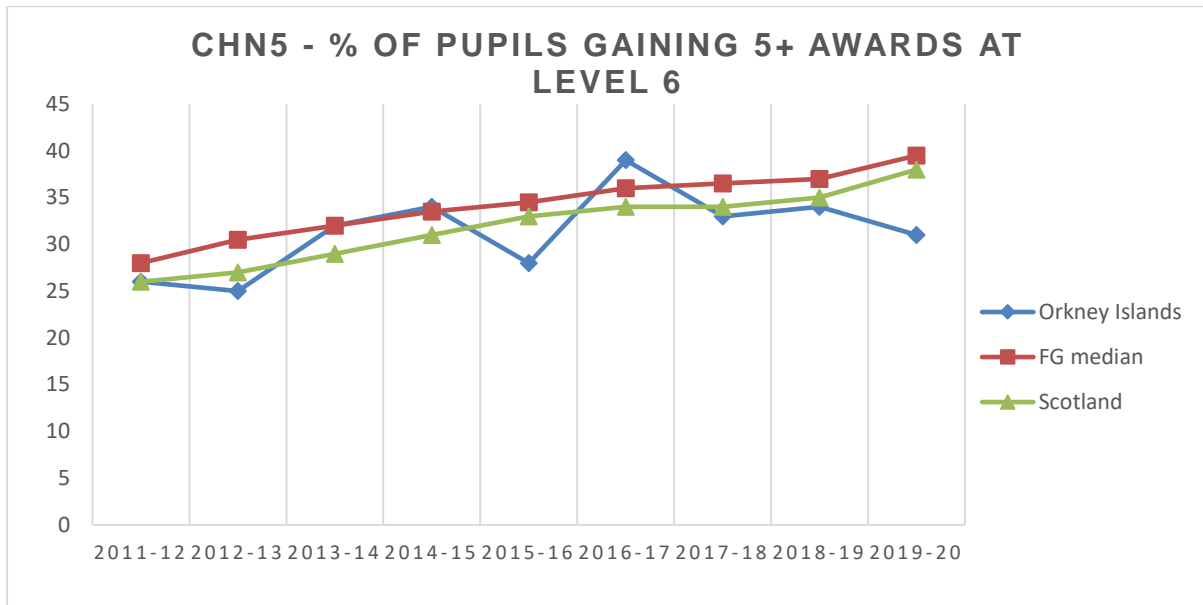
Future Action

Undertake additional analysis to ensure sequential data is offering a reasonable analysis; continue to monitor actual performance of schools; continue to cross reference LGBF data with Insight Data, noting both points of consistency and inconsistency.

Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 6

In 2019/20, 31% of secondary pupils in Orkney gained 5+ awards at level 6, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 34%, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 38%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	15	
2019/20	25	



Performance Analysis


Although the graph indicates a lack of consistency year on year, the trend indicates improvement in line with Scottish average, though the 'average' tends to sit below the family group.

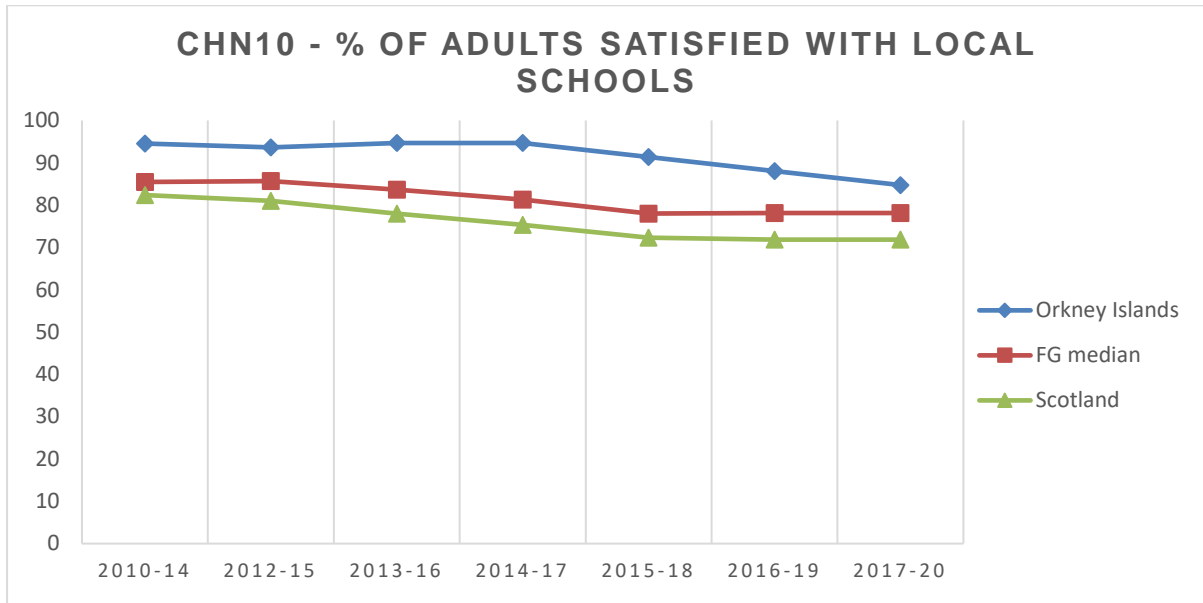
Future Action

In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort, however work needs to continue in relation to the review and scrutiny of progress within the senior phase. This includes work with our allocated Attainment Adviser to implement change and improvement, where necessary, in order to raise the overall performance to at least match the family group performance.

The percentage of adults satisfied with local schools

In 2017 to 2020, 84.73% of adults were satisfied with local schools, which is not as good as the 2016 to 2019 figure of 88.07%, but better than the 2017 to 2020 Scottish average of 71.83%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2016 to 2019	2	
2017 to 2020	3	



Performance Analysis


Overall (slight downward) trend is in line with the Family Group Median and Scottish average. Orkney's schools continue to maintain a strong standing with the local communities (in the family group only Shetland is doing better). Figures do not yet capture the local response to how the service has responded to the global pandemic.

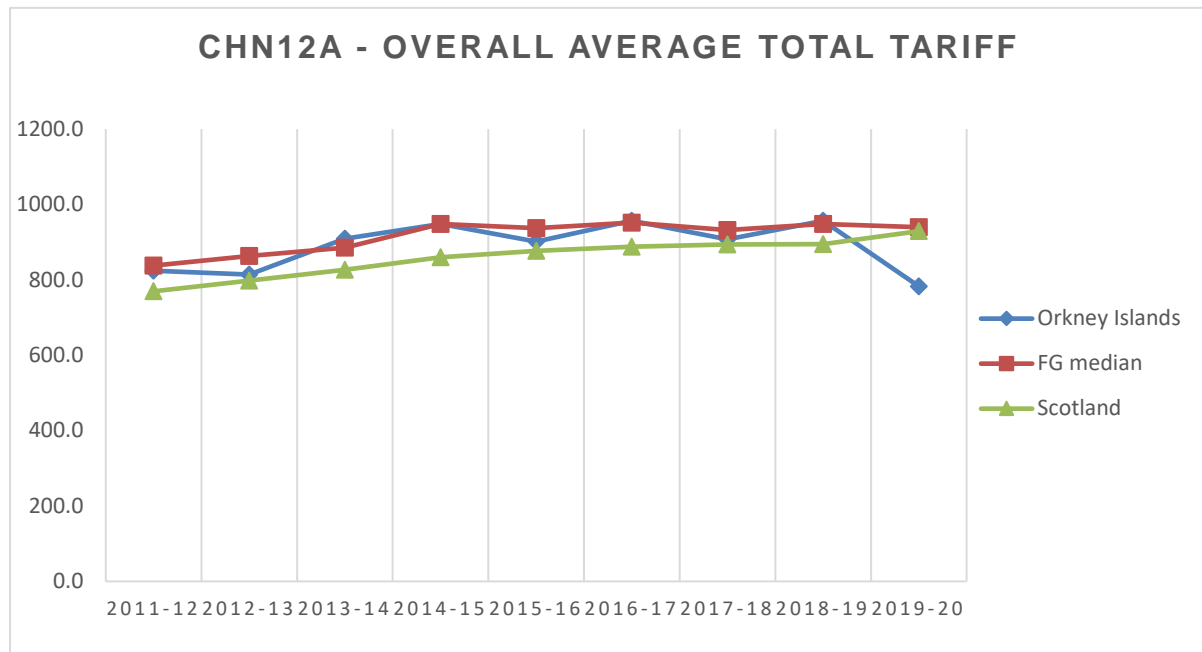
Future Action

Continue to reflect the importance of education in Orkney through the channels open to the service, including Parent Councils, local media and the staff team itself.

The overall average total tariff

In 2019/20, the overall average total tariff* for Orkney pupils was 783, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 957, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 929.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	5	
2019/20	30	



*The tariff score for a learner is the total number of tariff points for the awards they achieve, taking account of only their latest and best attainment in each subject. This means that, for example, if a pupil has a National 5 and a Higher in Mathematics, it is the points for the Higher award which are counted.

Performance Analysis

Following a very positive period up to 2019, 2020 shows a significant drop in average tariff score.


Detailed analysis suggests Orkney continues to outperform comparator groups for the lowest attaining 20%, 'match' performance for the middle 60%, but underperforms in relation to highest 20%.

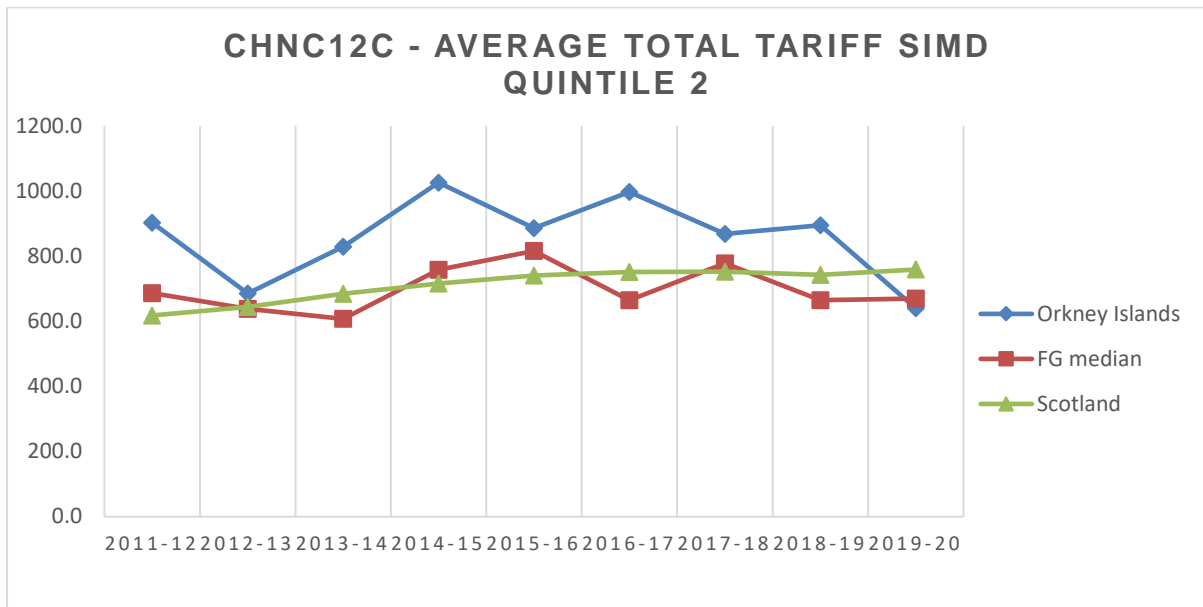
Future Action

In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort, however work needs to continue in relation to the review and scrutiny of progress within the senior phase. This includes work with our allocated Attainment Adviser to implement change and improvement, where necessary, in order to raise the overall performance to at least match the family group performance.

The average total tariff SIMD quintile 2

In 2019/20, the average total tariff for Orkney pupils in SIMD quintile 2 was 640, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 895, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 759.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	4	
2019/20	27	



Performance Analysis


While the most recent results show a significant drop (895 to 640) the rolling average is more stable. However, the fact that this year's position lies outside (and below) the previous trend line needs to be taken into consideration.

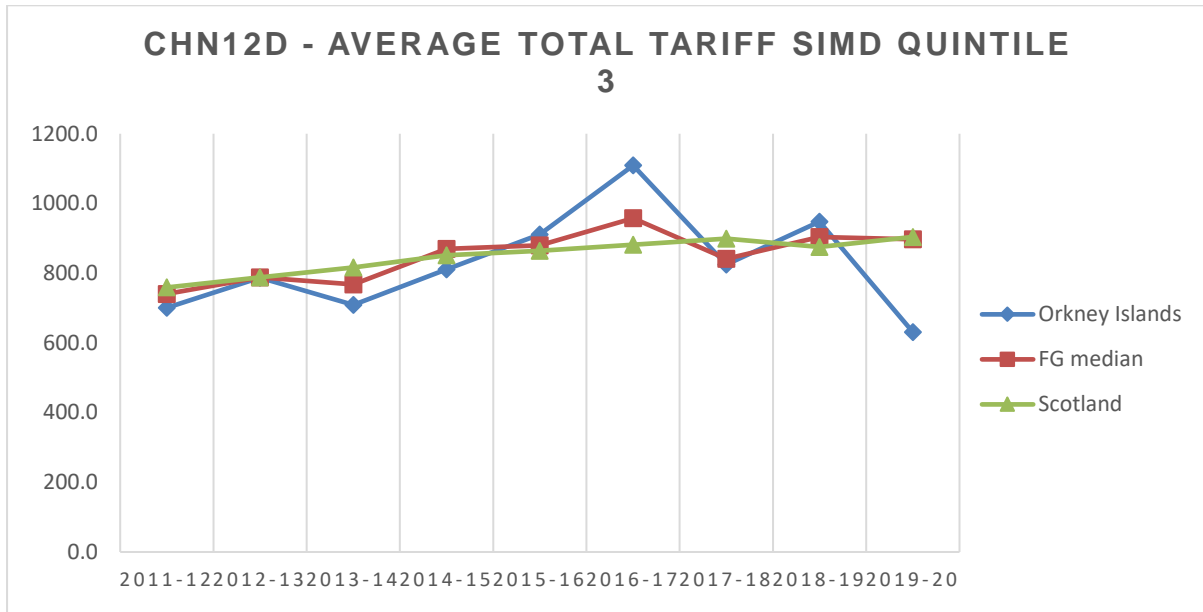
Future Action

In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort, however work needs to continue in relation to the review and scrutiny of progress within the senior phase. This includes work with our allocated Attainment Adviser to implement change and improvement, where necessary, in order to raise the overall performance to at least match the family group performance.

The average total tariff SIMD quintile 3

In 2019/20, the average total tariff for Orkney pupils in SIMD quintile 3 was 631, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 948, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 904.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	8	
2019/20	32	



Performance Analysis


While the most recent results show a significant drop (948 to 631) the rolling average is slightly more stable (with a positive peak in 2016, sitting outside the trend line). However, the fact that this year's position lies outside (and below) the previous trend line needs to be taken into consideration.

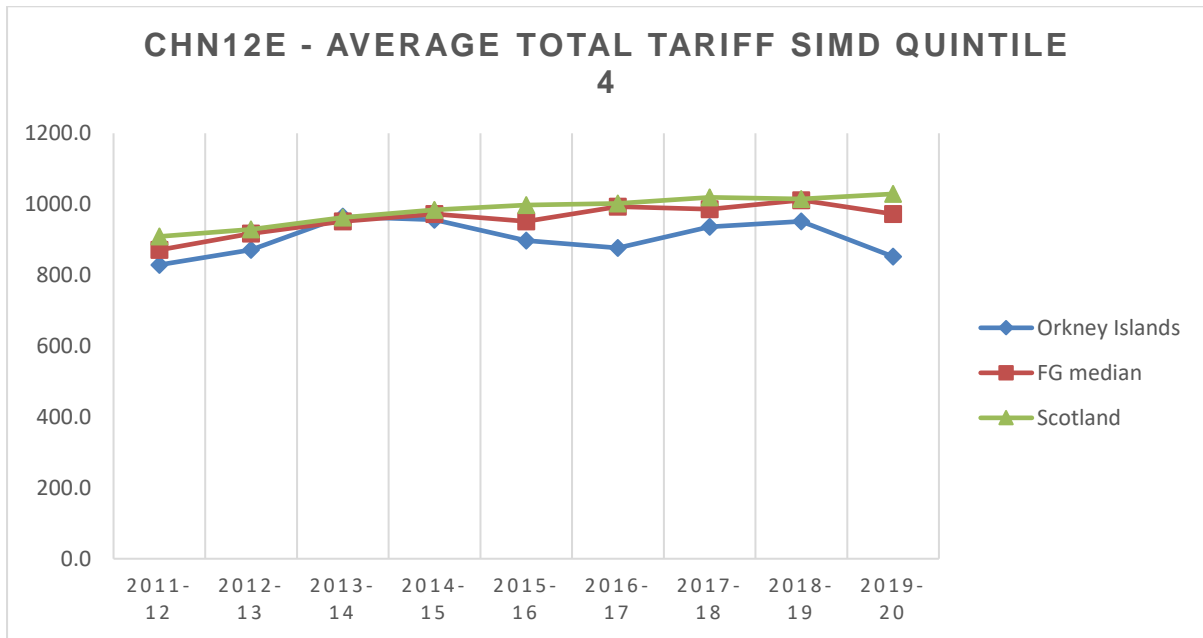
Future Action

In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort, however work needs to continue in relation to the review and scrutiny of progress within the senior phase. This includes work with our allocated Attainment Adviser to implement change and improvement, where necessary, in order to raise the overall performance to at least match the family group performance.

The average total tariff SIMD quintile 4

In 2019/20, the average total tariff for Orkney pupils in SIMD quintile 4 was 852, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 952, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 1,029.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	24	
2019/20	30	



Performance Analysis


The most recent results show a drop (952 to 852). This is significantly lower than the Scottish average and suggests an overall trend of decline is possible. This is a concerning result for the majority of our pupils which requires significant focus moving forward.

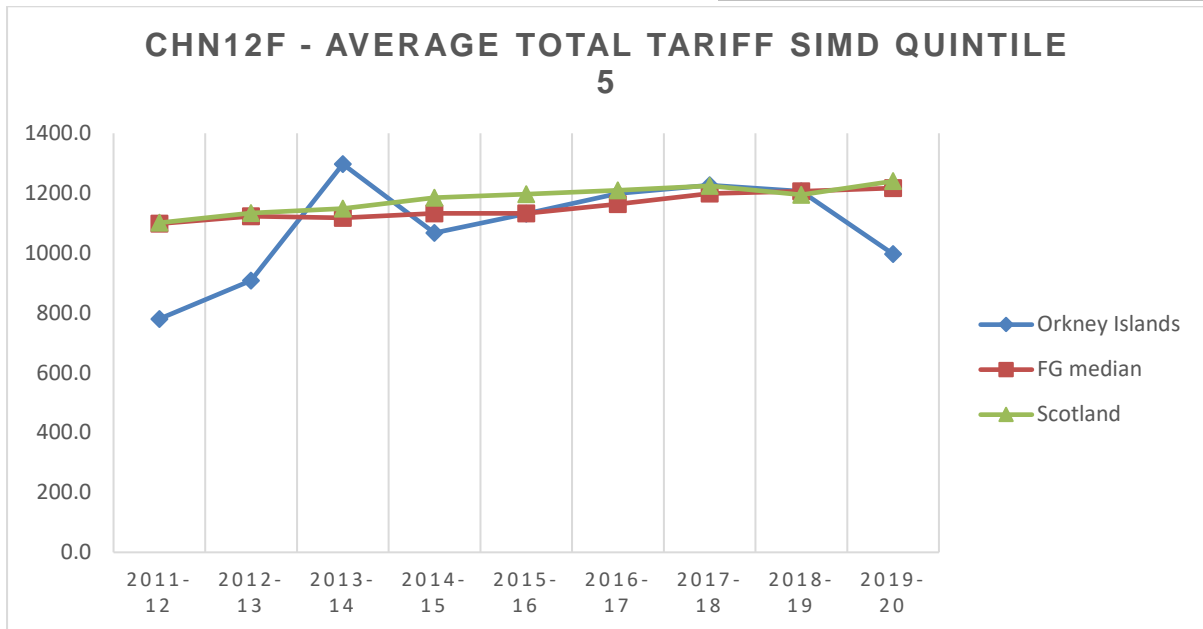
Future Action

In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort, however work needs to continue in relation to the review and scrutiny of progress within the senior phase. This includes work with our allocated Attainment Adviser to implement change and improvement, where necessary, in order to raise the overall performance to at least match the family group performance.

The average total tariff SIMD quintile 5

In 2019/20, the average total tariff for Orkney pupils in SIMD quintile 5 was 997, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 1,206, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 1,240.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	12	
2019/20	28	



Performance Analysis


With a strong trend pattern of gradual improvement (2014 being a positive outlier), 2020 show a significant drop in performance.

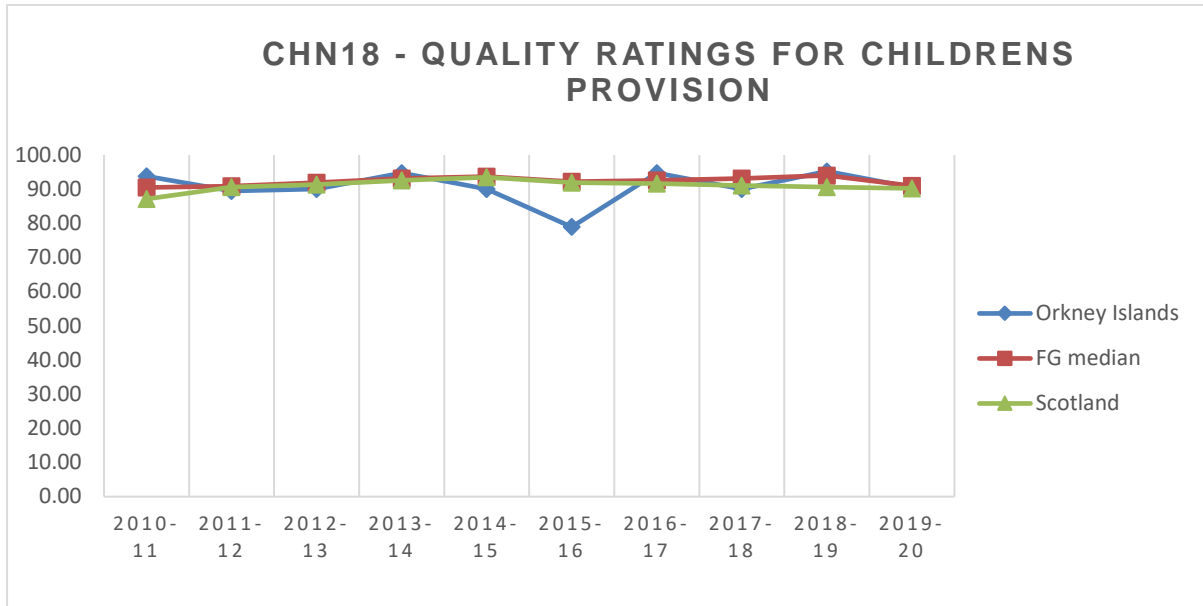
Future Action

In practice, the 2020 awards (based on teacher judgement) were consistent with both previous years and expectations across the cohort, however work needs to continue in relation to the review and scrutiny of progress within the senior phase. This includes work with our allocated Attainment Adviser to implement change and improvement, where necessary, in order to raise the overall performance to at least match the family group performance.

The percentage of early years provision which is graded good or better

In 2019/20, Orkney's funded early years provision which was graded good or better was 90.50%, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 95.24%, but about the same as the 2019/20 Scottish average of 90.20%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	10	
2019/20	17	



Performance Analysis

Performance of funded provision is consistently high. Each setting adds or deducts in the order of 5% difference, this means the data indicates 2 settings graded as less than good, one of which is now closed.


Future Action

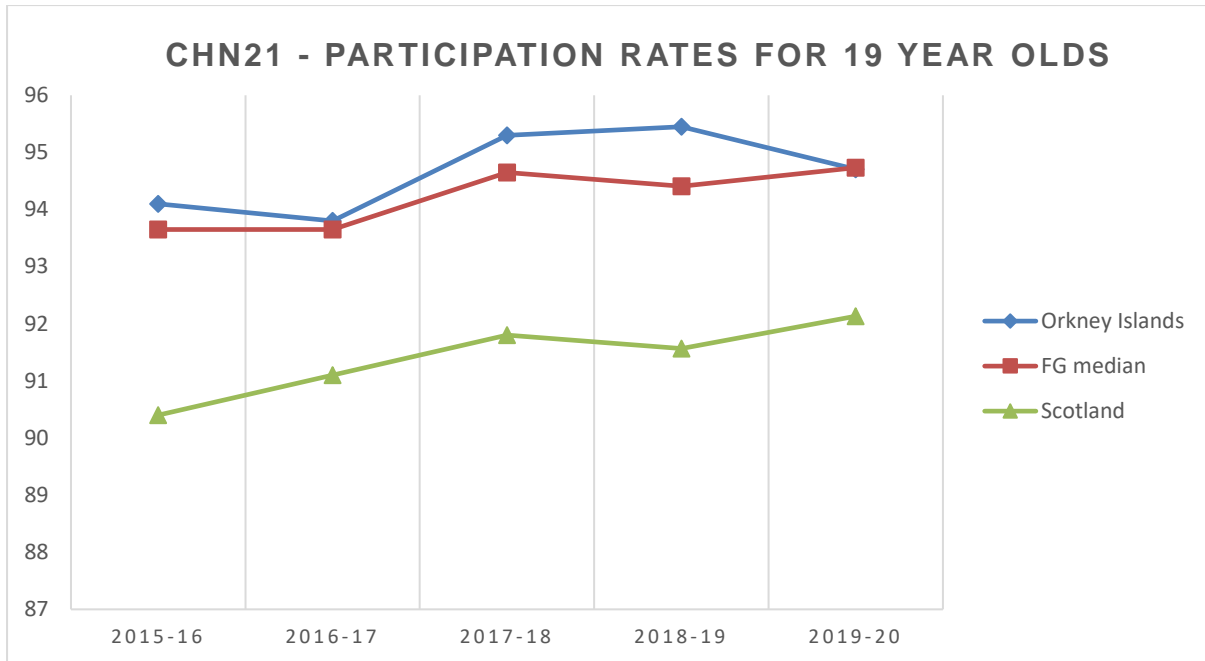
Targeted work is underway where settings have been graded as less than good.

In addition, the service will continue with the programme of learning, support and quality assurance provided by the Council's Early Years Team. Identify any provision 'at risk' and work with the practitioners and registered manager to bring about the necessary improvements.

Participation rates among 16 to 19-year-olds (per 100)

In 2019/20, participation in learning, training or work among Orkney's 16 to 19-year-olds was 94.71%, which is slightly less than the 2018/19 figure of 95.45%, but better than the 2019/20 Scottish average of 92.13%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	5	
2019/20	6	



Performance Analysis

While it is important to notice and note the small percentage drop this year, this is yet again a positive outcome for Orkney's young people.


Future Action

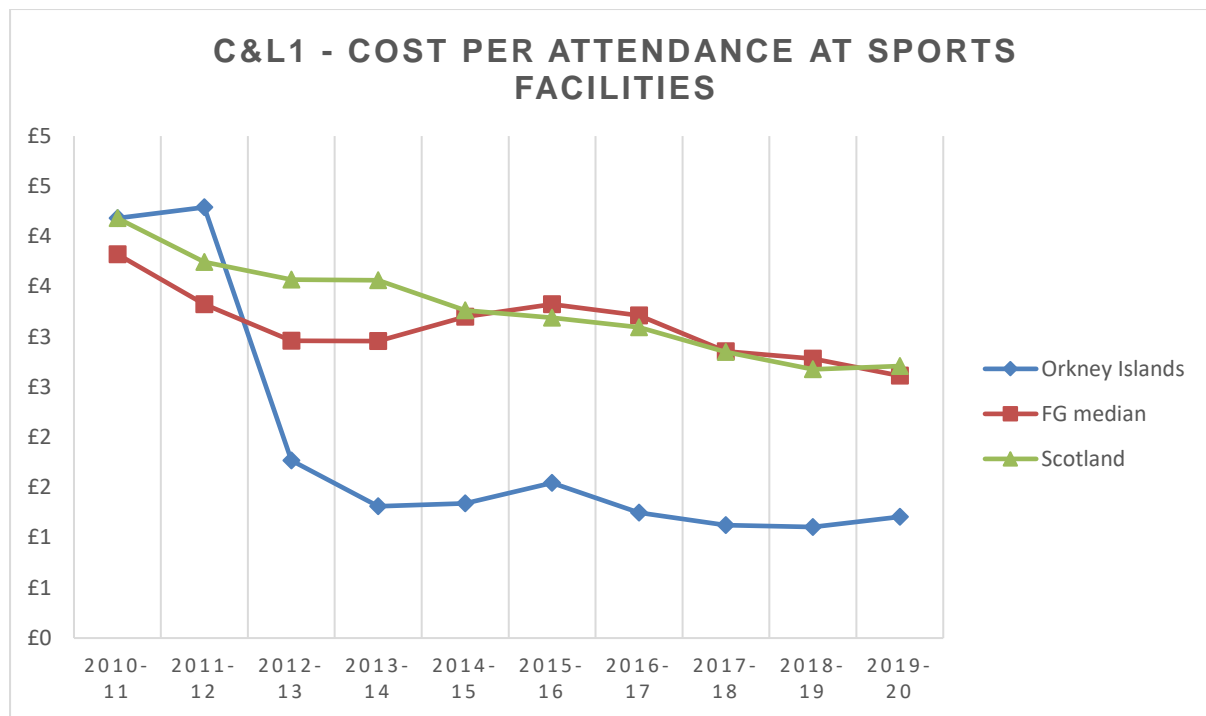
A very good partnership working model, with a significant contribution from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) as well as other key partners, has been established to ensure that young people's participation in education, work and training is monitored and that support or intervention is both timely and proportionate.

CULTURE AND LEISURE

Cost per attendance at sports facilities

In 2019/20, the cost per attendance at sports facilities in Orkney was £1.21, which is more than the 2018/19 figure of £1.11, but less than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £2.71.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	4	
2019/20	6	



Performance Analysis

Overall, the cost per visit continues to reduce. Comparing this data element to C&L5a (satisfaction) indicates that the services continue to provide good value for money.

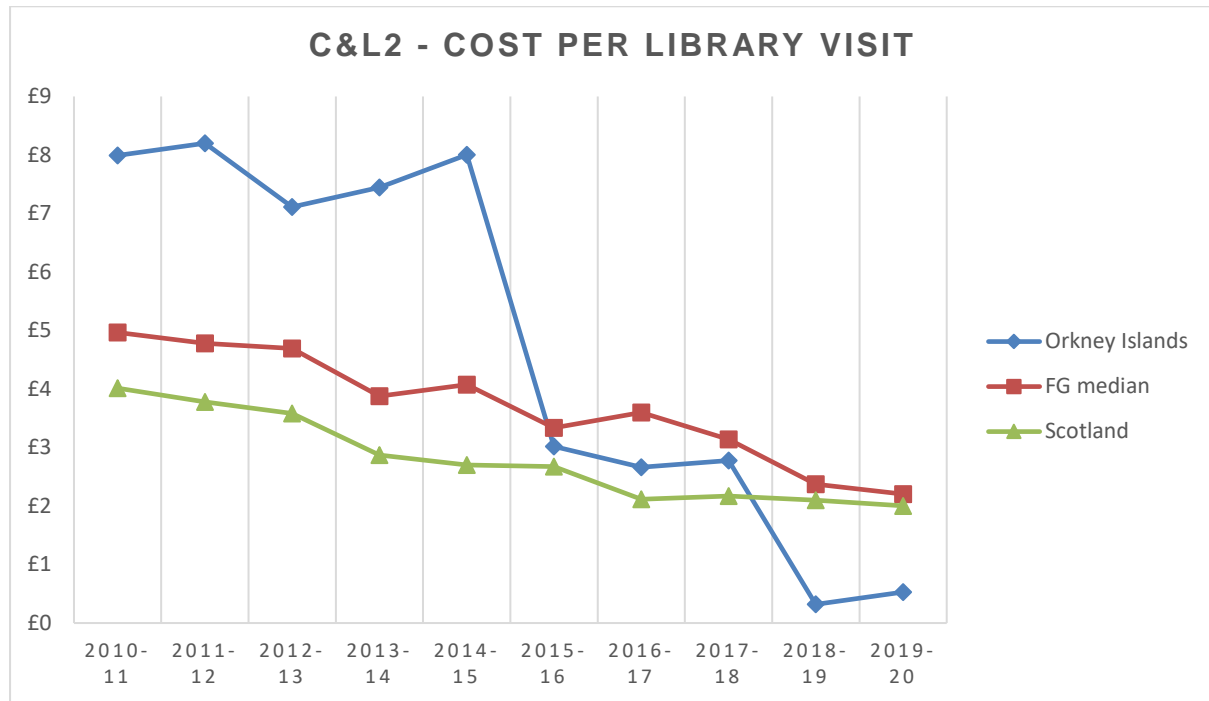
Future Action

Continue to look at ways to reduce the cost of the service (including extending opportunity for income generation) as part of the Council's overall approach to budget management.

Cost per library visit

In 2019/20, the cost per library visit in Orkney was £0.53, which is more than the 2018/19 figure of £0.32, but less than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £2.00.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	1	↔
2019/20	1	



Performance Analysis


Overall, the cost per visit has seen a dramatic fall since 2010 due to a number of cost-saving and efficiency measures that have been introduced. When compared to C&L5a (satisfaction) the overall picture is a high-quality service which offers good value for money.

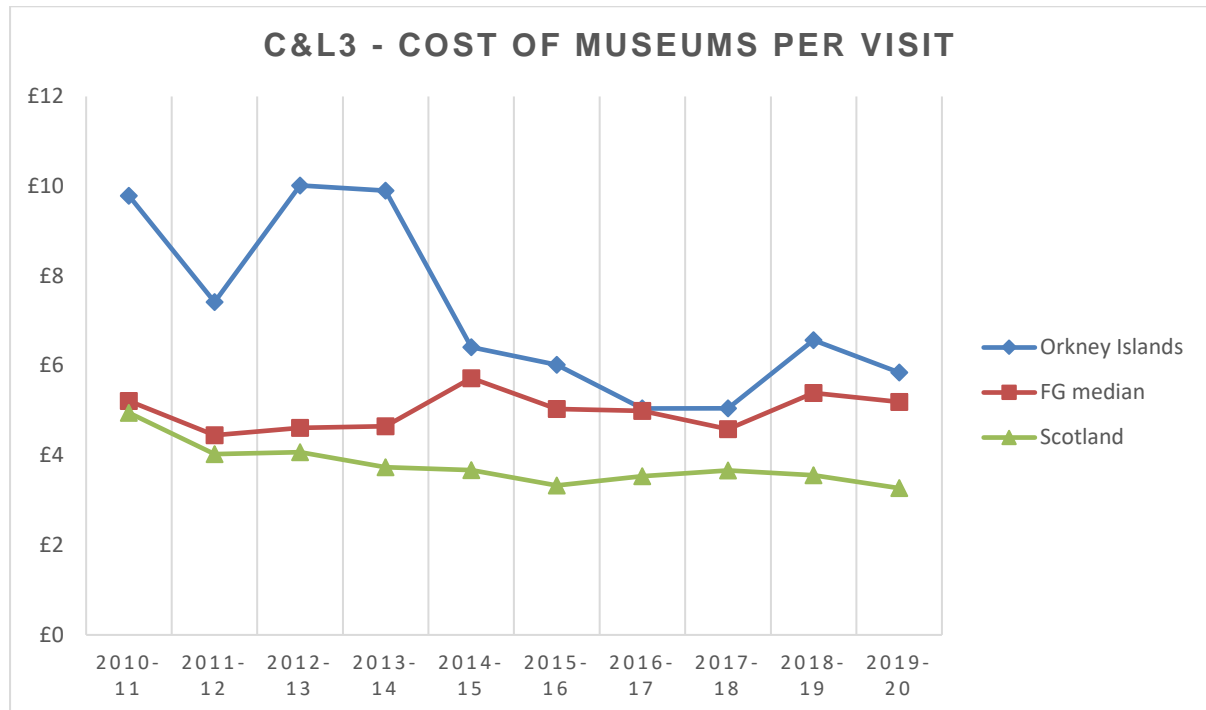
Future Action

Continue to look at ways to ensure service is effective and efficient as part of the Council's overall approach to budget management.

Cost of museums per visit

In 2019/20, the cost of museums per visit in Orkney was £5.85, which is less than the 2018/19 figure of £6.57, but more than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £3.27.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	24	
2019/20	20	



Performance Analysis

While the overall picture and trend is for reducing costs, cost per visitor is perhaps inevitably at the higher end (as opposed to museums in large urban settings) – each facility could accommodate more visitors but there is a finite potential number of visitors based primarily on the numbers of people visiting Orkney.

The additional and temporary burden of managing the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre project is leading to significant overrun in expenditure.

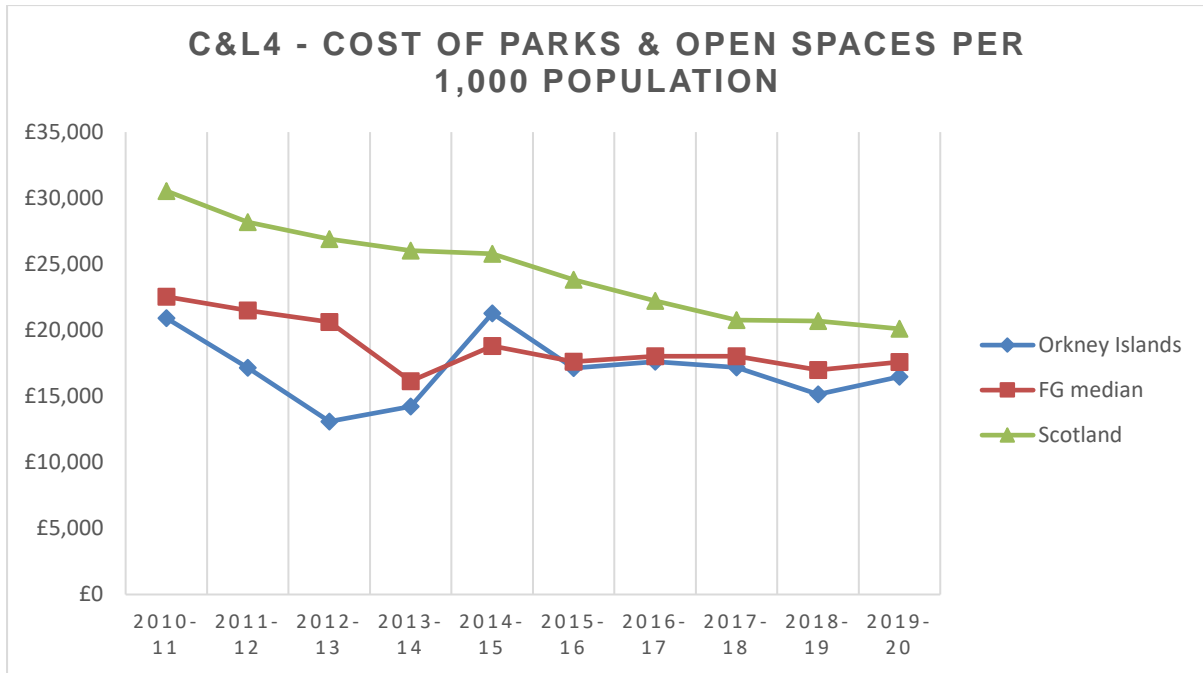
Future Action

Continue to review both short-term (project-based) costs and underlying (baseline) costs as part of the Council's overall approval for budget management.

Cost of parks and open spaces per 1,000 population

In 2019/20, the cost of parks and open spaces per 1,000 population in Orkney was £16,480, which is more than the 2018/19 figure of £15,143, but less than the 2019/20 Scottish average of £20,107.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	10	↔
2019/20	10	



Performance Analysis

The overall (downward) trend mirrors the Scottish average. Comparing this trend with the satisfaction figures (C&L5b) might indicate that more is needed to be done in order to provide value for money in this service area.

Future Action

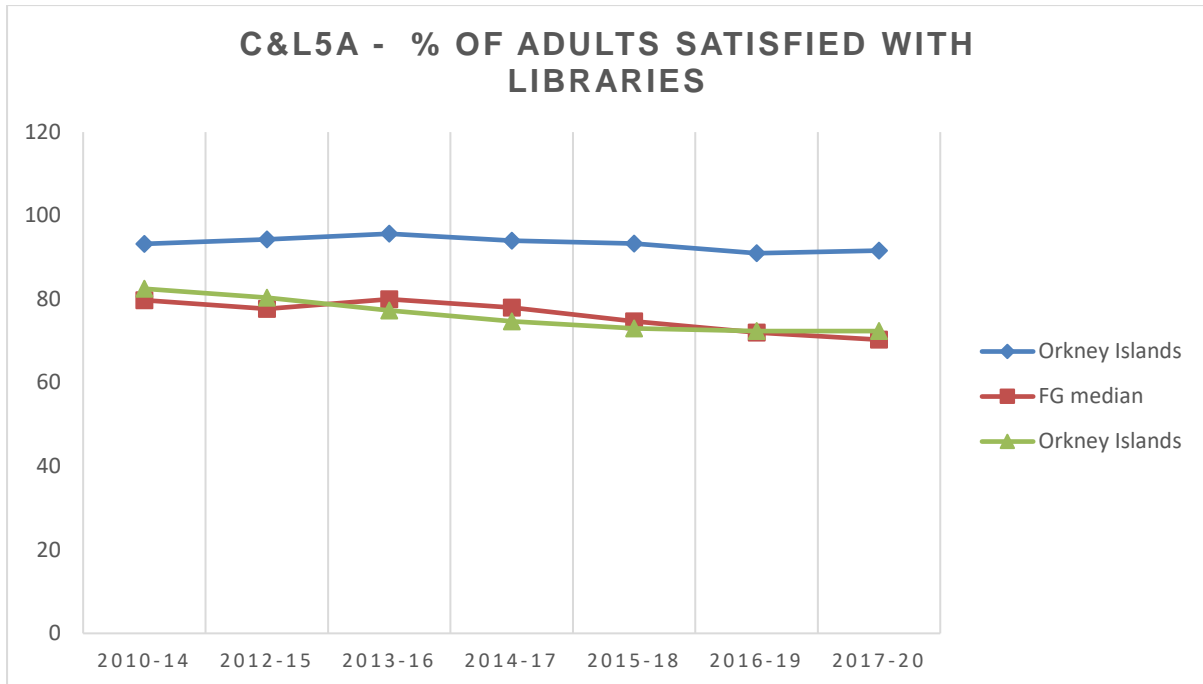
Review the business plan that supports activity within this area to ensure best value.

Percentage of adults satisfied with libraries

In 2017 to 2020, 91.67% of adults in Orkney were satisfied with libraries, which is slightly better than the 2016 to 2019 figure of 91.00%, and the 2017 to 2020 Scottish average of 72.37%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils

2016 to 2019	1
2017 to 2020	1



Performance Analysis

The percentage of adults satisfied with libraries remains high. When compared to C&L2 (cost per visit), the overall picture is of a high-quality service which offers good value for money.


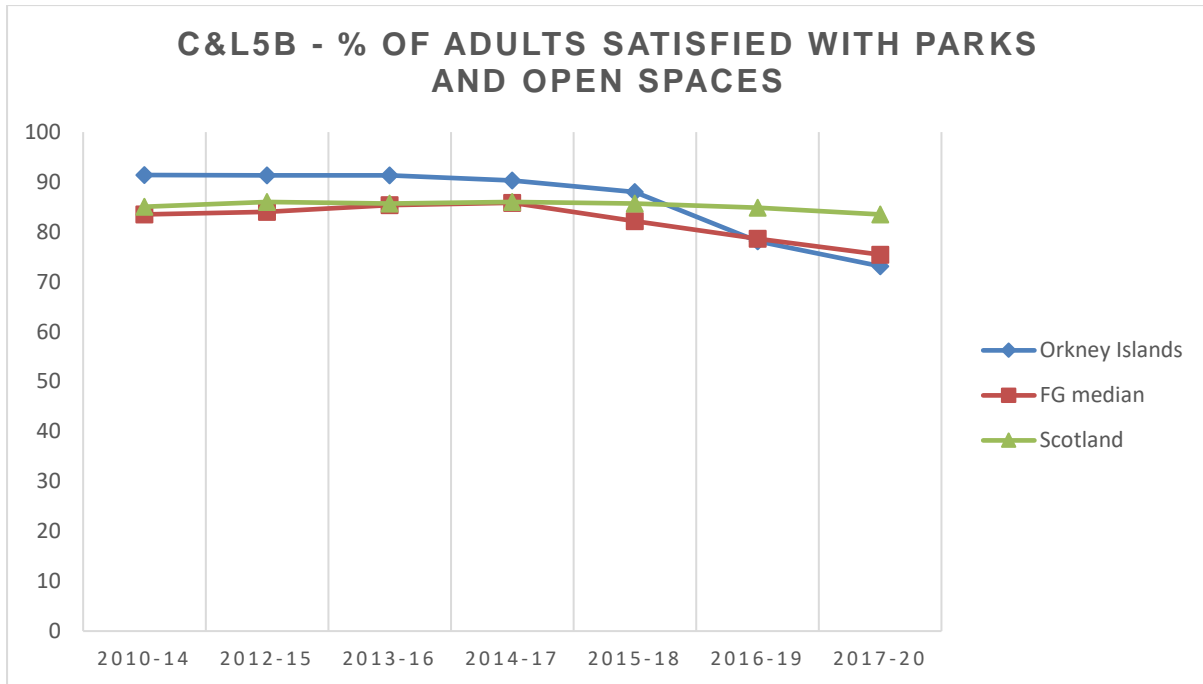
Future Action

Continue to look at ways to ensure service is effective and efficient as part of the Council's overall approach to budget management without this affecting service ability to deliver the successful Library and Archive service.

Percentage of adults satisfied with parks and open spaces

In 2017 to 2020, 73.13% of adults in Orkney were satisfied with parks and open spaces, which is not as good as the 2016 to 2019 figure of 78.13%, or the 2017 to 2020 Scottish average of 83.50%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils	
2016 to 2019	29
2017 to 2020	29

Performance Analysis


The overall (downward) trend is different to the national picture, but similar to the family mean. A reduction in investment/spend is likely to be a causal factor as the assets are deteriorating with a consequential reduction in levels of satisfaction.

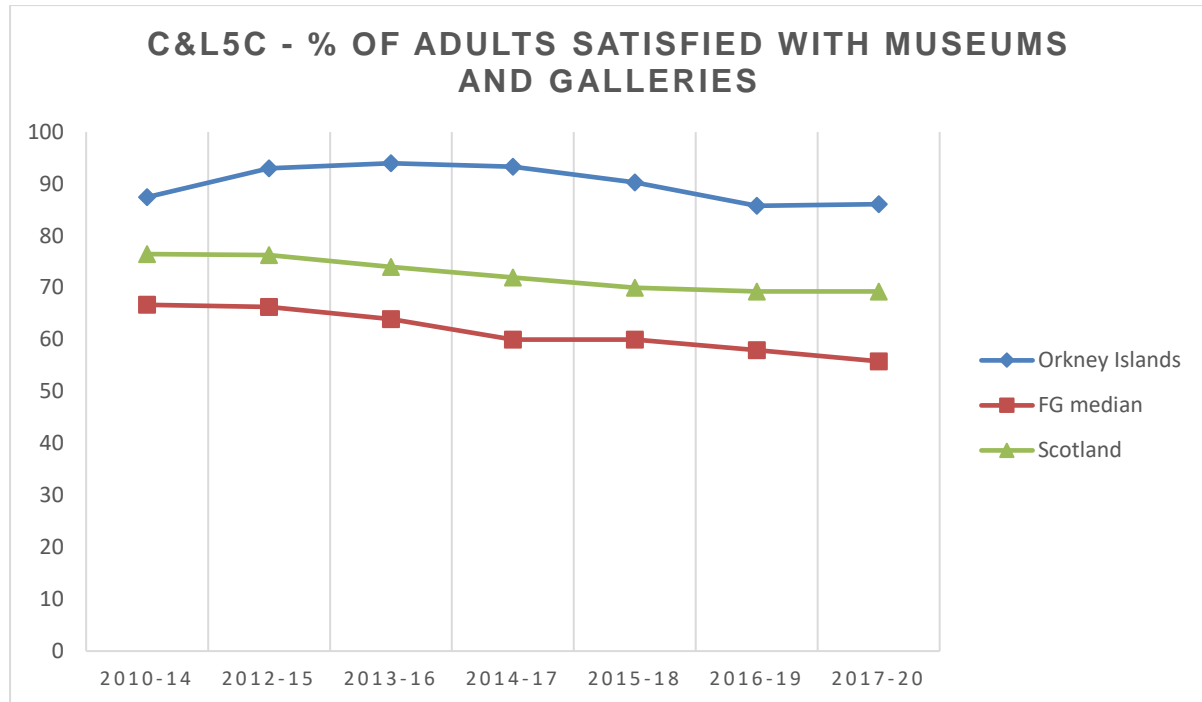
Future Action

Review business plan for the sector and financial support for the play area strategy; continue to work with local communities and encourage community participation/leadership in the development of schemes to enhance the local community

Percentage of adults satisfied with museums and galleries

In 2017 to 2020, 86.13% of adults in Orkney were satisfied with museums and galleries, which is slightly better than the 2016 to 2019 figure of 85.80%, and better than the 2017 to 2020 Scottish average of 69.30%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2016 to 2019	3	
2017 to 2020	4	



Performance Analysis


The local longitudinal trend appears to mirror an overall national reduction in satisfaction. Bearing in mind the long period of closure, site-specific feedback, remains positive.

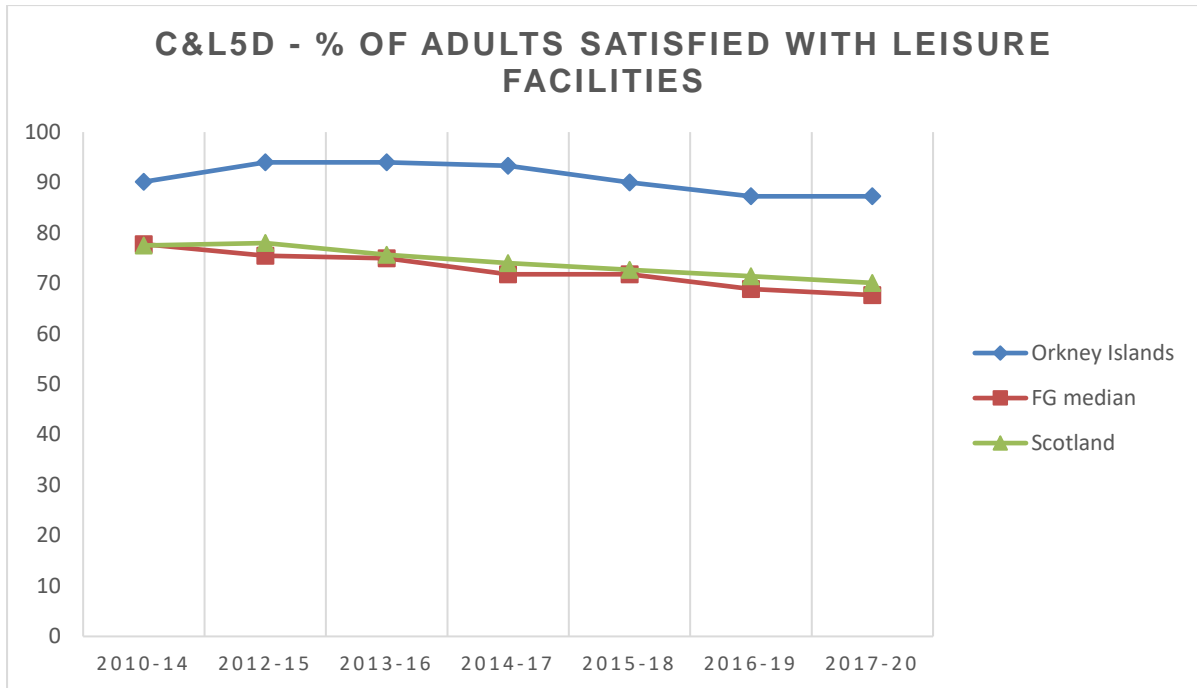
Future Action

Continue to look at new ways of making the collection accessible (including developing online and virtual exhibitions as part of the wider offer); continue with planning for the opening of the new visitor centre at Lyness (which is anticipated to boost numbers) to ensure positive feedback from visitors.

Percentage of adults satisfied with leisure facilities

In 2017 to 2020, 87.27% of adults in Orkney were satisfied with leisure facilities, which is the same as the 2016 to 2019 figure, and better than the 2017 to 2020 Scottish average of 70.10%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2016 to 2019	2	
2019 to 2020	2	



Performance Analysis

Satisfaction level remains buoyant, with the relative position being maintained. Actual satisfaction rate shows small decline which is mirrored nationally and within the family group


Future Action

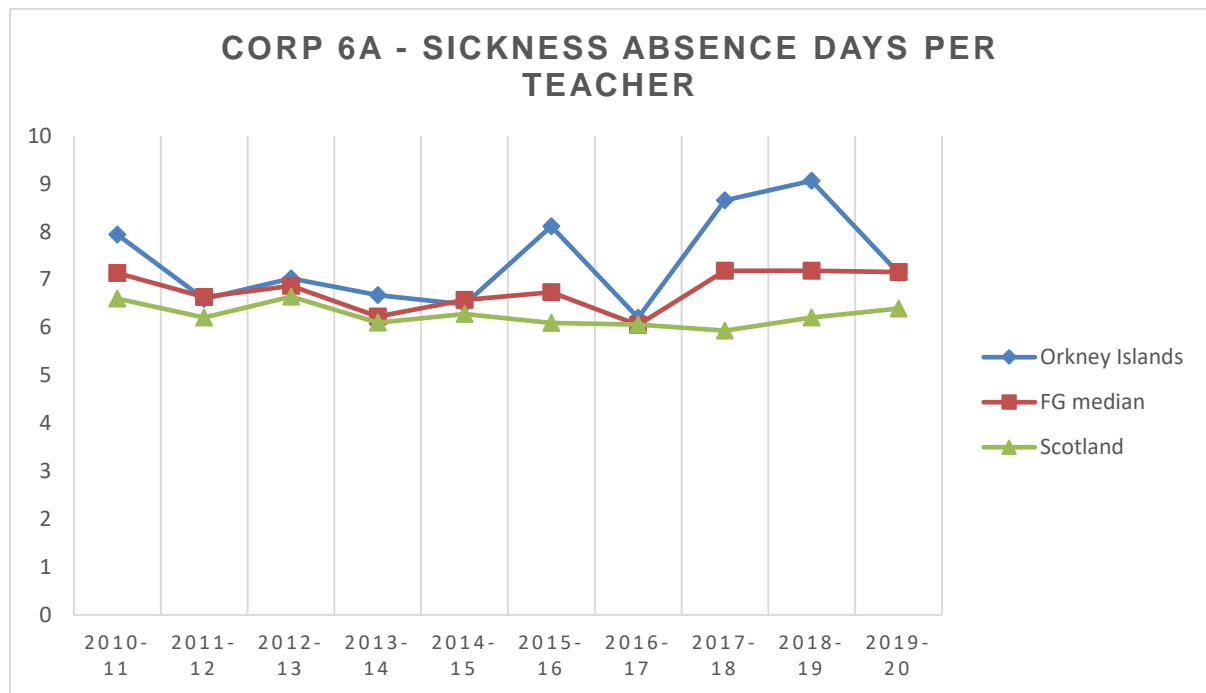
Continue to review and develop plans to maintain/enhance both facilities and activities, including participation in the Pickaquoy Centre Trust's 'Active Life scheme.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Sickness absence days per teacher

In 2019/20, an average of 7.14 days per teacher were lost due to sickness absence in Orkney, which is less than the 2018/19 figure of 9.06 days, but more than the 2019/20 Scottish average of 6.40 days.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	32	
2019/20	21	



Performance Analysis

While the reduction in absence is to be welcomed, the level of sickness absence amongst teaching staff continues to be a priority for the Council corporately and for the Education Service itself. Action underway needs to continue if the overall and longitudinal trend is to improve.


Future Action

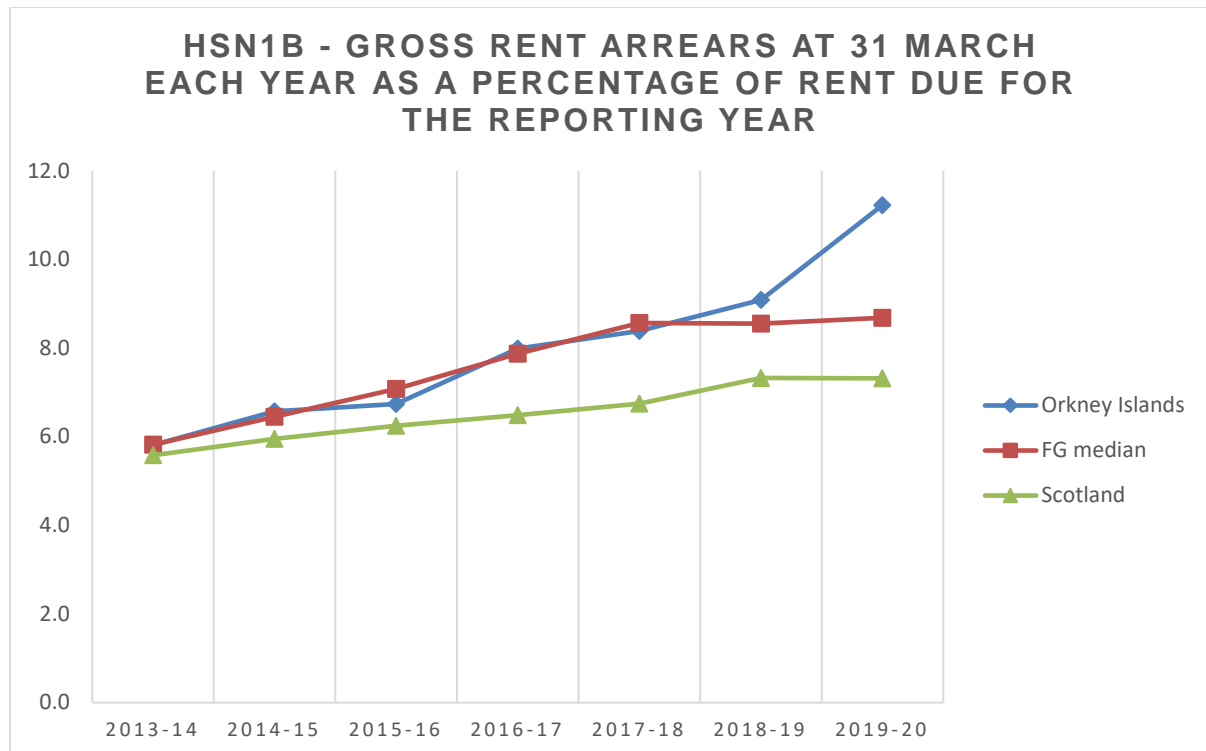
The service will continue with current systems of monitoring absence levels and taking appropriate action to support staff experiencing ill-health.

COUNCIL HOUSING

Gross rent arrears as at 31 March each year as a percentage of rent due for the reporting year

In 2019/20, the level of Council house rent arrears was 11.22%, which is more than the 2018/19 figure of 9.09%, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 7.31%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	21	
2019/20	25	



Performance Analysis

The Council's Housing Service is a member of Scotland's Housing Network, an organisation that offers a benchmarking service to councils who wish to be members. It also offers other related services including sub-groups to discuss good practice and peer review using council staff to assess services offered by other councils as a reciprocal arrangement.

A report is presented annually to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee which details all of Housing Services' performance in comparison with its peer group (other small councils) and the national average. This indicator of gross rent arrears includes both current and former tenant arrears as a percentage of rent due. Nationally there are high levels of former tenant arrears written-off. Orkney adopts a prudent approach to write-offs and endeavours to collect former tenant arrears. However, at 31 March 2020, the process of writing off former tenant arrears was delayed due to COVID-19. Had write-off been completed on time, it would have been 9.1%. This is in comparison to a national average of 34.4%.

While generally Orkney's performance in relation to collecting rent from current tenants has been consistently above average across Scotland as a whole, the roll out of Universal Credit in September 2018 impacted on rent collection generally. This situation was replicated nationally. However, rent collection has declined and recovery of arrears is vital to the health of the Housing Revenue Account. The Council continues to actively pursue rent arrears and has consistently increased its focus on arrears recovery over the course of financial year 2020/21.

Future Action

It remains important to ensure that former tenant arrears are continually reviewed to ensure that the most appropriate action continues to be taken to recover the debts outstanding and to analyse procedures to see if improvements can be made. These are difficult types of debt to recover and in some instances may take many years to clear.


The Council will continue to actively seek to recover rent arrears and currently is assisting tenants who are facing financial difficulty as a result of the impact of COVID-19. This includes assisting tenants to claim Universal Credit / Housing Benefit, making referrals for debt advice and income maximisation etc.

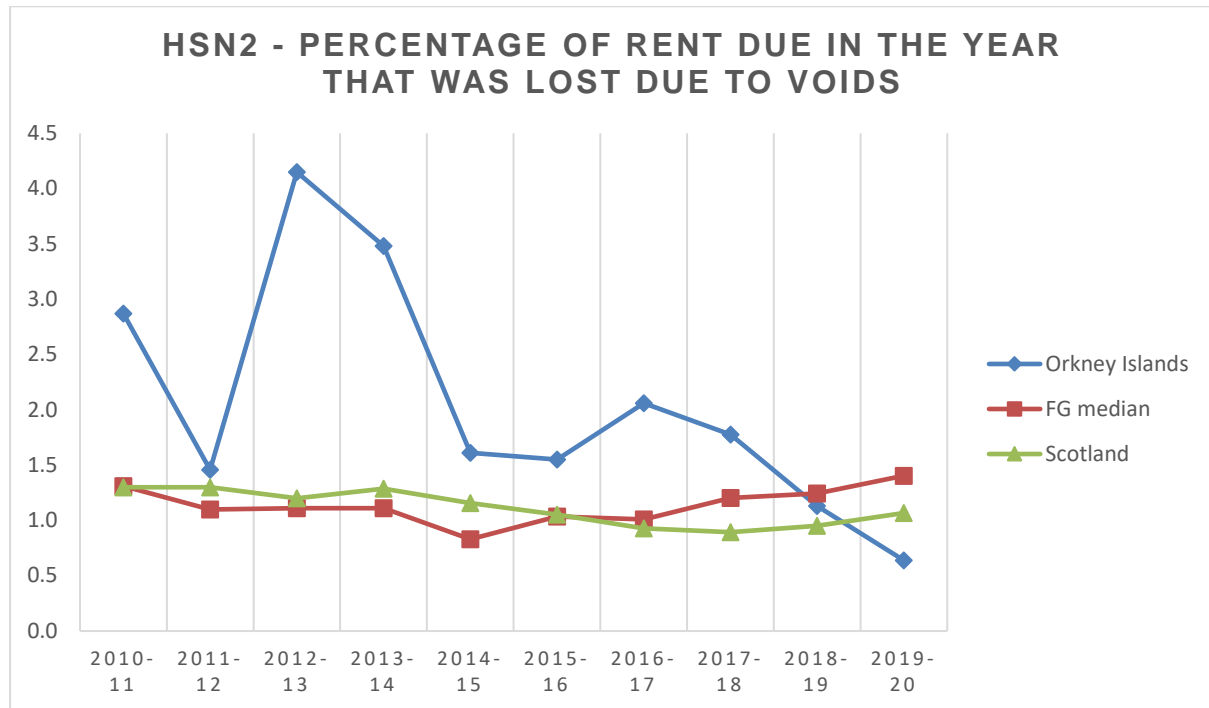
Eviction remains a last resort. Obtaining an eviction decree does not always result in the tenant being evicted. For instance, the tenant may clear their arrears or begin making regular payments towards the debt and the decision may be taken to offer a new tenancy instead. The Council may have duties under the homelessness legislation to re-house households they have previously evicted.

Equally it remains important that rental income is recovered appropriately and every effort will be made to work alongside tenants, to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 and the roll out of Universal Credit and to seek to address some of the issues arising accordingly.

Percentage of rent due in the year that was lost due to voids

In 2019/20, 0.64% of Council house rent due was lost due to properties being unoccupied, which is less than the 2018/19 figure of 1.13%, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 1.07%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	17	
2019/20	6	



Performance Analysis

Void rental loss is affected by context and Orkney’s remote and rural context can impact on void rental loss disproportionately. The performance outlined above is often impacted by a small number of properties which have been vacant for 200 days or more. This figure may be subject to variation from one year to another and this can lead to fluctuations given the small overall sample.

During 2019/20 no newly built properties were completed which resulted in a lower turnover of properties. While this can impact positively on void rental loss, in turn it results in fewer properties becoming available for those who require to be rehoused.


In addition, there have been sustained improvements in the operational procedures surrounding voids. There are regular joint meetings between frontline staff in the relevant internal departments with the specific aim of reducing void periods.

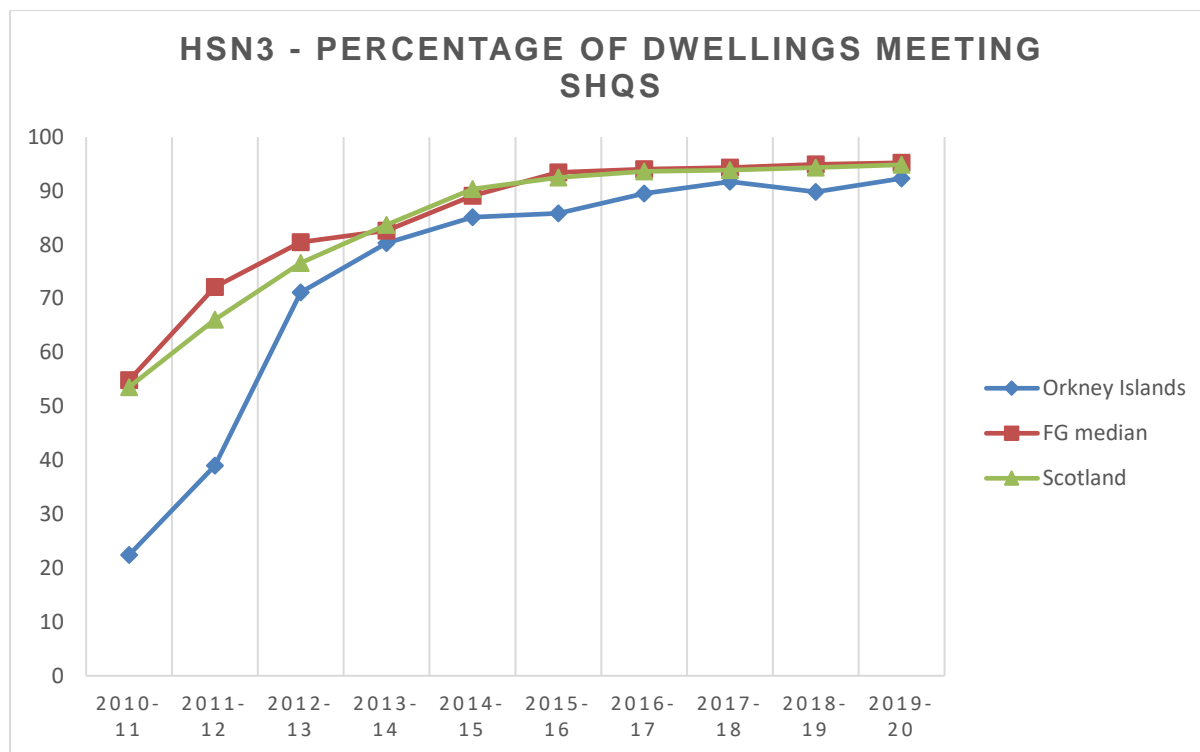
Future Action

The new procedures remain in place and void rental loss will continue to be monitored. It is likely however that void rental loss will be higher during 2020/21 given that the initial impact of COVID-19 prevented properties from being re-let for a period of time, travel to outer isles was restricted, and therefore void periods will have been impacted accordingly.

Percentage of dwellings meeting Scottish Housing Standards

In 2019/20, 92.33% of Council housing in Orkney met the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, which is better than the 2018/19 figure of 89.84%, but not as good as the 2019/20 Scottish average of 94.86%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	24	
2019/20	23	



Performance Analysis

Traditionally Orkney has recorded a higher proportion of properties recorded as an exemption or abeyance than is true for Scotland generally. At present, following a significant review of abeyances and exemptions, this is broadly averaged at 3.47% of the Council's stock in comparison to an average of all Scottish Local Authorities of 4.02%.

A property may be classified as being in abeyance when work cannot be done for 'social' reasons relating to tenants' or owner-occupiers' behaviour, for example, where owner-occupiers in a mixed ownership block do not wish to pay a share of a secure door entry system and do not consider it to be necessary. Another example would be where the tenant is elderly or suffering from a medical condition that has led them to feel that they do not wish work to be undertaken on their home at this point in time.

A property can be classified as an exemption where the property is capable of meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard on a particular element but the landlord believes it is not possible to meet it for technical or legal reasons or because the cost is considered disproportionate.


This review has led to a reduction in the level of abeyances and exemptions and also improvements in the depth of information held on the Council's stock. Abeyances have reduced from 31 in 2017/18 to 16 by 2019/20. Exemptions have reduced from 34 in 2017/18 to 17 by 2019/20. However, in turn this has caused a temporary increase in the number of properties failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Fails have risen from three properties at year end in 2017/18 to 40 recorded as failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard over the next year in 2019/20. Most of these are marginal fails and works are ongoing to address the reason for failure on the majority of the properties concerned during this financial year.

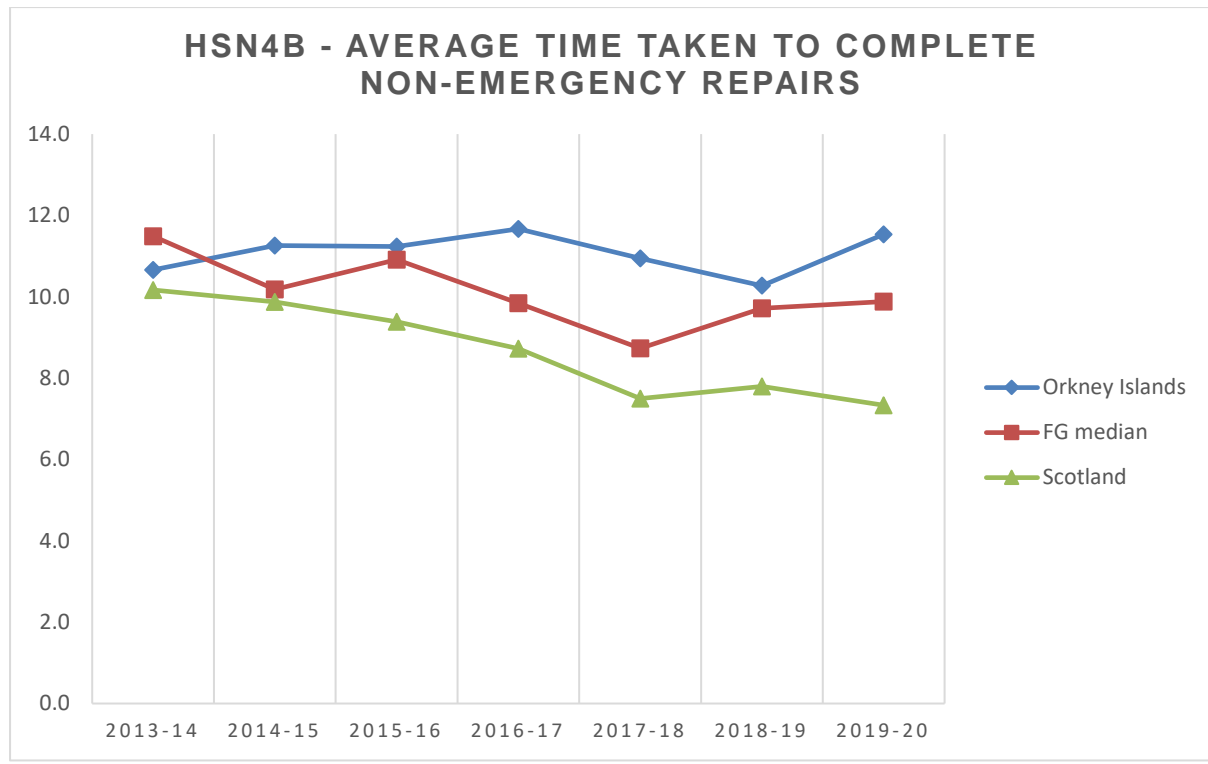
Future Action

Work will continue to be progressed in respect of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. The fails outlined above will predominantly be addressed during financial year 2020/21. In addition work will continue in relation to reducing abeyances and exemptions as and when this becomes a potential. This may include when properties are returned to the Council. Where the cost is prohibitive, it is likely that the Council will take steps to remove the particular property from its stock.

Average number of days taken to complete non-emergency repairs

In 2019/20, it took an average of 11.53 days to complete non-emergency repairs to Council housing in Orkney, which is not as good as the 2018/19 figure of 10.27 days, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 7.33 days.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	21	
2019/20	24	



Performance Analysis

The area of repairs is one where context is particularly relevant with some councils setting very challenging timescales for completion well ahead of the legislative requirement. Orkney’s geography presents some challenges in that respect.

The time taken to deliver non-emergency repairs has declined slightly from the previous year. Some analysis has been undertaken of cases where the time to complete the repair was in excess of 20 days to determine what the key issues were in such cases. While this relates to a minority position (approximately 12% of non-emergency repairs), it is generally as a result of shortages in key trades including electricians. This has impacted negatively on overall timescales. Contractors will endeavour to increase their staffing where this is relevant and viable.

However, the time taken to deliver emergency repairs has improved over the year. New processes have been implemented where our in-house Building Inspectors / Clerks of Works undertake some of the emergency repairs themselves where they are able to do so. This has been a key factor in reducing the time taken to undertake emergency repairs. The implementation of a mobile app is now well


underway with the Council's main Measured Term Contractor trialling the system prior to full implementation with their service. It is anticipated this will allow increased accuracy of reporting time to complete repairs.

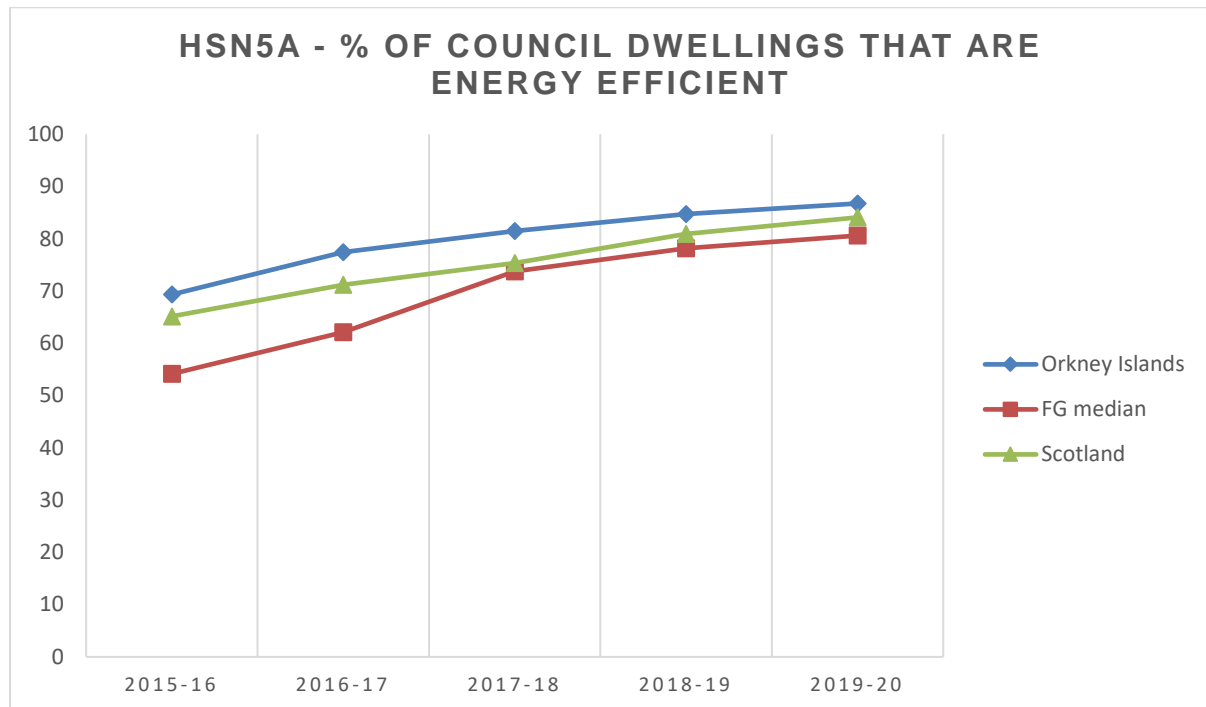
Future Action

The mobile app is operational and a trial is underway. This will be implemented fully once the trial is complete. This should assist in ensuring accurate completion times are recorded. We continue to work with contractors to encourage faster invoicing and greater accuracy of recording.

Percentage of Council dwellings that are energy efficient

In 2019/20, 86.76% of Council houses in Orkney were energy efficient, which is better than the 2018/19 figure of 84.71%, and the 2019/20 Scottish average of 84.10%.

Rank out of 32 Scottish Councils		
2018/19	11	
2019/20	10	



Performance Analysis

The Council must also ensure that its properties meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing – the first target was December 2020. Further challenging standards will be required to be met by 2032. Consequently, Committee receives an annual update report at the June cycle of meetings, regarding progress towards this.

Orkney has very specific issues relating to energy efficiency including no mains gas and specific property types leading to additional challenges. We also have very few “cloned” properties which means we have a high percentage of property with their own Energy Performance Certificates which gives us a much more accurate and full understanding of our stock’s standard.

The level of Orkney’s properties which met the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing by March 2020 was 86.8% in comparison to a Scottish average of 85.8%.

Future Action

A process of ongoing review is underway in order to identify the works required to meet future standards and to endeavour to ensure that appropriate financial plans are in place.