

Shetland's Local Annual Child Poverty Action Report, Year 7

Reporting on 2024/25



Foreword

The aim of this report is to demonstrate the level of child poverty in Shetland in the last year and to demonstrate actions that Shetland Islands Council, NHS Shetland and many partners are doing to prevent or mitigate its impact across Shetland. It has been shared and discussed at SIC's Children & Families Committee as well as Full Council and the NHS Board and will be a discussion point for planning across our strategic partnerships in the next year.

We hope this report showcases the breadth and depth of work going on as well as highlighting the power of working in partnership between organisations and listening to the views of families and individuals we work with.

Despite the reported activity having a positive impact on children and families and the rate of child poverty decreasing locally (reflecting the national picture) there are big considerations for how we support families in Shetland. Shetland may be the third lowest Local Authority in Scotland for children living in low-income families, however this doesn't account for the higher cost of living in remote and rural Scotland.

As winter approaches, we all start to think about the additional costs that living in Shetland brings; especially as the cost of living has been evidenced to be 20-65% higher than on the UK mainland. Shetland's context is different from much of the country with an ageing population, relatively low unemployment and high job density. Next year Shetland will be expected to publish an updated plan on how we will reduce child poverty for the next three years. It is important that we can build on evidence that reflects our circumstances.

Much of this work touches on these national developments and cultural changes such as Keeping The Promise, Children's Rights and Family Wellbeing. One of the things connecting these priorities is having staff with the right values and skills to work with diverse needs of families they encounter. This report also includes examples of staff development to help achieve this. We know that stigma and shame around poverty are real and a strong theme across many of the pieces of work has been opening access for all regardless of situation or background. Organisations and staff are constantly trying to balance being available to all while reaching those who require most support. There is a strong will to be creative and collaborative to solve problems but a recognition that things can be better.

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

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Introduction

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

It is important that:

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

Drivers of Child Poverty

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

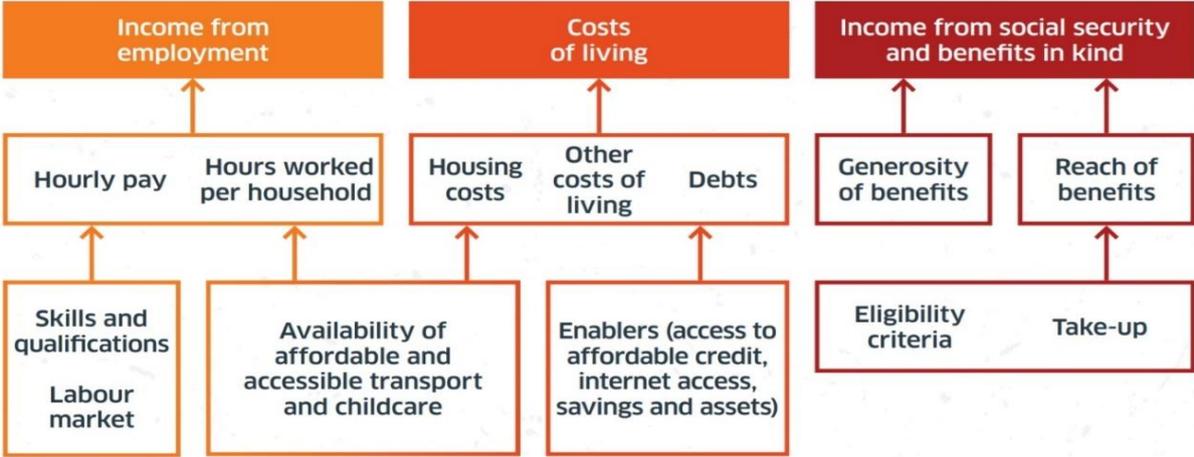
The priority groups for the "Best Start, Bright Futures" plan in Scotland include

- lone parent families,
- minority ethnic families,
- families with a disabled adult or child,
- families with a younger mother (under 25),
- families with a child under one,
- larger families (three or more children).

These groups are identified as having a higher risk of being in or at risk of being in child poverty. The approach to this report focuses on supporting all families and parents but prioritising those who need most help. While much of the work below is targeting the groups above, many of the examples are looking at ways of supporting ALL families and preventing stigma/stereotyping. Due to the relatively small numbers in populations in Shetland, it is not always possible to monitor specific groups in terms of income/poverty.

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

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



Approach on Reporting

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

The second and main part focusses on activity and impacts from 2024/25 by partners and communities. These are set out under three headings, as a series of updates and case studies. Mirroring Best Start Bright Futures (2022), we look at a wide range of examples of activity which contribute to:

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

This year’s report will also focus on wider **staff development and upskilling** and values based cultural change on how to work with people/families in our community who may be most vulnerable at most at risk of poverty through Trauma Informed principles. The rationale behind this link is that those experiencing symptoms of trauma are most likely to have lower life outcomes while those living in poverty are more likely to suffer an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE).

Strategic Connections

This report has direct connections to the Shetland Partnership Annual Report 2024-25, the new Shetland Partnership Delivery Plan, and the Shetland Children’s Partnership Plan.

Many of the case studies in this report are featured in the Shetland Partnership Annual Report 2024-25 as they contribute to the Partnership Priorities as well as the drivers of child poverty.

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

- The strategic actions required to primarily mitigate the impact of Child Poverty are set out in both this report and in the Shetland’s Children’s Services Plan (23-26), Priority Area 3 – Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Children and Families.

- The strategic actions required to support structural change to reduce Child Poverty are set out in the Shetland Partnership Delivery Plan (i.e. this delivery plan has been developed through a lens of reducing Child Poverty).

The Work being done across the community also feeds into national priorities such as The Promise and UNCRC Incorporation. The Promise Scotland was established by Scottish Ministers following the Independent Care Review in 2020 which found that the current care system was not working. On 5th February 2020, Scotland made a promise that all children would grow up loved, safe, and respected. Last year, Promise Scotland published Plan 24-30, which is built on five foundations: ‘family’, ‘voice’, ‘care’, ‘people’, and ‘scaffolding’. This plan provides a route map for keeping the Promise in Scotland, with the vision that, wherever safe to do so, families are supported to stay together.



Poverty affects the community’s ability to fulfil The Promise. Conditions of poverty influence a family’s ability to provide for their children. Once a child is in care, a family may find themselves in very challenging financial circumstances. In some cases, financial supports were almost immediately cut off at the point when a child was removed from the care of their birth parent. Poverty-proofing For Families in or on the Edges of Care is based on research by OPFS with Child Poverty Action Group, and with The Promise Scotland providing advice and support.

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



In the summer of 2024, the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child was incorporated into Scots Law and therefore Public Bodies across Scotland should use their maximum resource to make sure rights are met.

Poverty is one of the main barriers to a child having their rights met. Children have the right to have their family supported and to benefit from social security. They have a right to an adequate standard of living, including nutritious food and a safe warm home. They have rights to the highest attainable standard of health, to extra support if they are a young carer, or disabled, or care experienced – groups we know who are disproportionately impacted by poverty. They have the right to survive, grow and develop, and governments must do everything they can to prevent the deaths of children and young people. (<https://www.cypcs.org.uk/positions/child-poverty/>)

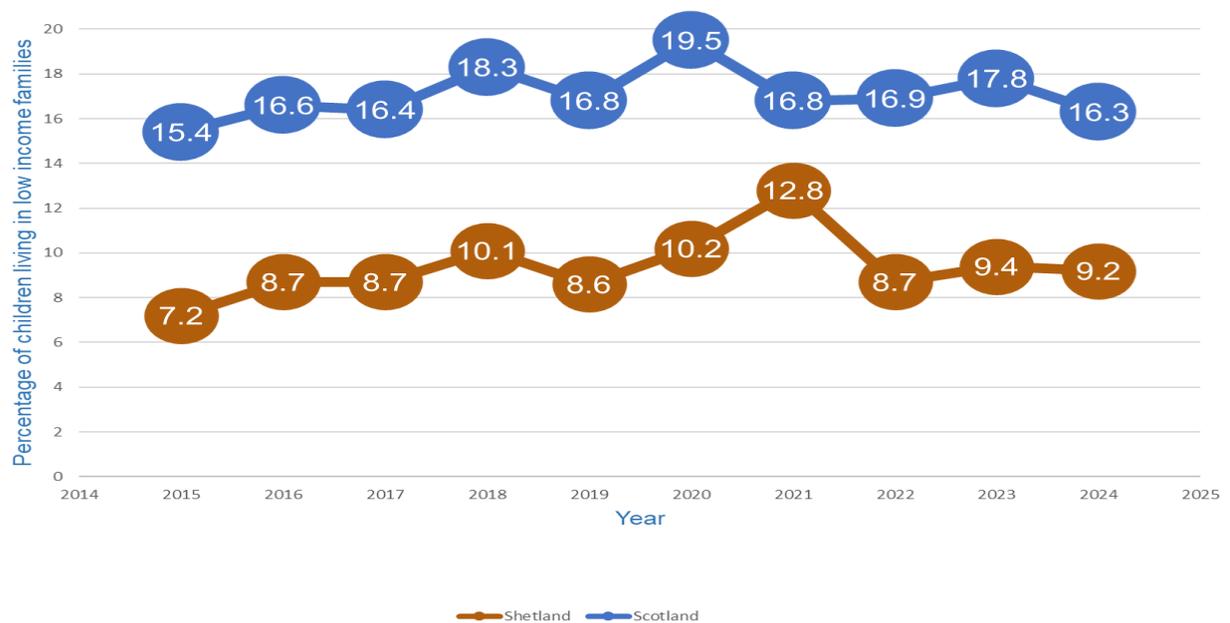
What we know: Child Poverty in Shetland

Poverty and Cost of Living Data for Shetland

Like Scotland, child poverty in Shetland has gradually increased since the early 2010s – although levels are consistently lower than Scotland as a whole, **9.2% of children were living in low income families in Shetland in 2023/24** (decrease of 0.2% from previous year). Scotland’s level averages at 16.3%.

While Shetland had the third lowest level of children living in low-income families in Scotland in 2023/24 (after East Renfrewshire & East Dunbartonshire), this is higher than pre-pandemic levels with fluctuations reflecting national patterns.

Percentage of children living in low income families over time



For purposes of this report Child Poverty is defined as those living in low income families (with less than 60% of median household income) (Child Poverty Action Group). It is not having enough money to buy the things your household needs and to participate fully in society (CPAG 2025). Please note this graph relates to ‘before housing costs’ rather than after. There has also been a change in devising the rates since last year and so the graphs above reflect the new formula through the years.

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

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

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

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

Shetland has one of the highest employment rates in the country (**85.9% of working age in 2024**), one of the lowest unemployment rates (**1.8% in 2024**) and the highest youth participation measure in Scotland (**97.5% of 16–19-year-olds in Scotland were participating in education, employment, or training**).

In 2024-25, **23.3% of Shetland school pupils were registered for Free School Meals** - an increase from 17.1% (Shetland Islands Council). This follows the alignment decision made by Shetland Islands Council on 22 February 2023 with regards to Free School Meals and Clothing Grants and to increase clothing grants by 50% in 2023-24. This decision was followed on 27 March 2024 when during an annual review of this arrangement, it was decided to increase clothing grants and to align free school milk eligibility to the above too.

Foodbank usage is still much higher than ten years ago but has decreased since last year. An average of **92 food parcels were distributed per month** by the Shetland Foodbank in 2024-25, a decrease from 137 parcels per month on the previous year. It is still significant to note that 1,541 people during the year, with approximately **17% of those helped being under the age of 16**.

Locality Profile Data

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

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

Please note that due to the small scale of population, there may be skewed results or trends at times, for example, if a family moves from one area to another.

Cost of Living impacts more on our rural communities and especially on Shetland’s smaller islands communities. *(Not all individual ward details been published for 2023-24)*

Locality	Children in Poverty (2023-24) %	Cost of Living (% compared to Shetland average - 20-65% over UK average)	Out of Work Benefits 2023/24 (% claiming)	Median Income (2022) (% compared to Shetland average of £34,095)
Lerwick & Bressay	11.8	-13	12.2	-3.1
Central	11.4	-8	8.6	13.2
North	9.2	8	8.8	-6.6
South	11.4	-8	7.2	23.4
West	7.3	+8	8.3	-1.9
Whalsay & Skerries	7.4	+13	3.4	-22.2
Yell, Unst & Fetlar	7.5	+13	9.7	-25.7
Shetland	9.2		9.3	

What We Have Done (2024/25)

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

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

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

The planning and delivery of actions in order to address structural changes required to reduce Child Poverty, are set out in the Delivery Plan for Shetland's Partnership Plan, 2023-2028 www.shetlandpartnership.org/downloads/file/73/shetland-partnership-delivery-plan-2023-2028

This section of the report focuses on the rationale, activity, impact and learning from 2024/25. Activities and case studies by SIC, NHS Shetland and partners, which contribute to the drivers of child poverty highlighted will be grouped into three main sections – each one reflected by the drivers below:

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

This report will also highlight longer term **professional development** happening across our workforce and how our organisations' staff are **upskilled in how to respond to ever changing situations and needs in families** they may work with.

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

Work offers a sustainable route out of poverty for many families and has a strong role to play in a balanced approach to tackling poverty (Best Start, Bright Futures, 2022). The Scottish Government outline that for this to be possible, a wide range of systems need to align. This includes a strong labour market with fair and flexible employment; along with availability of affordable and accessible transport and childcare; skills and qualifications; and fair hourly pay for instance.

The Scottish Government's six priority family groups for tackling child poverty are:

- **lone parent families,**
- **households with a disabled member,**
- **families with three or more children,**
- **minority ethnic families,**
- **families with a child under one,**
- **and families with mothers aged under 25.**

Over the past year, there have been examples of local collaborative working to support these groups, supporting parents into employment, increasing childcare availability/flexibility and support businesses and fair work in the island's economy.

Engaging and Supporting Local Employers in Flexible/Supported Employment Shetland Local Employability Partnership (SLEP)

The Local Employability Partnership (SLEP) is made up from various partners and stakeholders in the community aiming to:

- **create an inclusive, supportive, and dynamic employability system that empowers all individuals in Shetland to achieve sustainable employment and contribute to the local economy.**
- **provide tailored, person-centred employability support that addresses barriers to employment, promotes inclusive growth, and ensures no one is left behind.**

Shetland's employability landscape is challenging and not reflective of national trends. Currently Shetland has a high job density (more jobs than working-age people) with many local employers/services voicing concerns about recruitment, retaining staff and engaging with young people. There is a high proportion of those not in work also having sort of Additional Support Need, disability or barrier to accessing work due to travel or childcare. By upskilling employers, the rationale would be to make conditions easier for those with barriers (e.g. parents) to be able to apply and remain in work.



As part of a range of related activities in February 2025, SLEP wanted to focus on engaging local employers and supporting them to consider potential challenges and issues facing their potential workforce (especially those in all priority groups) so they are better equipped to attract, recruit and maintain staff.

A morning Session featuring three separate seminars aimed at local employers was held at Shetland Museum & Archives with three different themes based on perceived local needs and national priorities:

- **Creating Inclusive Work Environment: Benefits of Flexible working for everyone. (Flexibility Works)**
- **Making Changes in the Workplace to Support People in Employment. (Scottish Union for Supported Employment)**

What is our future workforce telling us? How to engage them and develop existing workforce. (Skills Development Scotland)

Developing Young Workforce and Business Gateway invited local employers and staff to attend any of the seminars they wished. All events were free with a format of interactive presentation and discussions.

There were **37 local employers/staff attending the sessions** (with the majority attending them all). As well as Shetland based employers and services, some employability staff from Shetland, Orkney and Western Isles also engaged.

Feedback was very positive with:

All respondents surveyed afterwards saying they were 'satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied'.

Over half of respondents felt they knew 'a lot' more about future workforce engagement.

All participants saying they felt they knew 'somewhat' (56%) more or 'a lot' (44%) more about Supported Employment.

All participants saying they felt they knew 'somewhat' (50%) more or 'a lot' (50%) more about Flexible Working.

The numbers in attendance reveal that there is a local appetite for supporting employers and training on these themes. Most surveyed felt there should be at least two events like this per year. Some of the written feedback also stated a want for more time and in-depth discussion.

As well as these seminars, employers/providers have now been invited to help support SLEP's delivery plan from 2026. This will help inform priorities and activity in a way that is based on local employer needs.

Plans are to create similar formats in 25/26 with a combination of issues that employers want to discuss and ones which the Partnership and stakeholders feel are important. For example - one theme that was seen as a priority was supporting employers to hire people who are justice-experienced and tackling stigma associated with this. However, at the time of organising, no national body was able to commit to travel to Shetland to deliver this. The Partnership are exploring how to make this happen in 2025/26. Some of the suggestions from participants on future themes included succession planning, recruitment and employee wellbeing/engagement.

While the numbers of attendees were high, it was noted that some of Shetland's biggest private employers were not represented. Therefore, next year some more targeted promotion will be done in advance as their engagement can have more potential impact on recruitment and supporting individuals with barriers to work.

The timing of the event this year coincided with Shetland's Career and Opportunities Day. Next year the plan is for both those activities to go under the banner of Shetland Employability Week so that resources and contacts can be pulled and activity streamlined. Activity was funded through Scottish Government's No One Left Behind policy.

Removing Barriers for Parents with Paid Traineeships (Shetland Islands Council, Employability Pathway and Schools' Catering & Cleaning)

Through the SIC's Youth and Employability Service, Shetland Local Employability Partnership (SLEP) undertook a Test for Change project this year aimed at parents (from any of the priority groups) in order to:

- Increase the income to families through employability opportunities (training/career path development/jobs).

- Normalise family support, and ensure child and family centred approaches, across all of their supports.



Data and participant conversations also show that one of the biggest issues with poverty in Shetland are obstacles gaining sufficient employment or developing a career due to lack of

childcare or transport. This was especially spoken about by those in priority groups such as Lone Parent families.

A recent survey by the Early Learning and Childcare team found that 48.6% of parents/carers felt they had barriers to accessing school aged childcare was not sufficient to meet their family needs with 71% saying they relied on informal networks (friends/family) for childcare.

When asked, 55.2 % participants in the Employability Pathway cited Transport as a barrier in finding work due to lack of public transport options or not having private vehicle use.

The Shetland Employer Recruitment Incentive (SERI) aimed to mitigate these barriers by offering paid six-month traineeships to parents/carers that fit around the school/nursery day and in an appropriate location within Shetland Islands Council's Catering and Cleaning team. Parents/carers were able to enter/return to the world of work where they were able to gain skills, train in an industry where there are vacancies available and eventually work in an appropriate role that could be flexible to caring and transport needs.

Individuals were referred to the scheme via the Council's Employability Pathway. All were looking to enter or return to employment but claimed childcare, a lack of experience or general lack of confidence were barriers to doing so. By starting everyone at a similar time, Employability Support Workers could liaise with School Catering and Cleaning Management staff to assess individuals' needs and provide them with the most appropriate placement locality available and working at hours that suited their family's needs. All Priority groups were represented in this cohort.

As well as being paid at Living Wage rates and being supported to train for the role, individuals would also be guaranteed an interview with the service (if a relevant position became available) after completing their placement.

As well as the work placements, participants remained supported by the Employability Pathway and received guidance from support staff before/during and after their placement in order to help transition them to work/career progression afterwards. This took the form of a light touch induction as well as supported online training using the Digital College before going into settings.

The project was funded by the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind Tackling Child Poverty as well as SIC's School's Catering and Cleaning budget. Some additional resources came from the council's Youth and Employability service.

Six Parents took part in the project in October 2024 with four going on to complete the placement on 31st March 2025 (one of the others who didn't secured employment elsewhere just before their placement finished). At the time of writing this, out of those who completed their placement, all have been offered places on the Council's Relief Bank of Catering and Cleaning staff at the very least with one securing regular work in a school setting. While the placements have just finished, Catering and Cleaning staff feel confident those on the relief list may be offered something more secure in the near future if they wish. Employability staff also noted this programme has been one of the most successful methods of getting parents into a place where they feel they can go back to work.

As well as securing work, the impact of creating flexible placements and removing barriers has been significant with all participants saying that was the crucial factor in being able to take part:

“I had various jobs before but struggled with childcare. Working school hours and around holidays was crucial and it was a bonus with hardly any travel.”

“Previously I wasn’t aware of what work was within school hours and was struggling with childcare and finding suitable hours. I don’t drive and public transport from my home to most job was very limiting so being able to walk to my work and near the children’s school was a big help.”

They feel more confident and motivated about their career prospects. There has been an increase in social and personal skills as well as learning the value of teamwork.

“People accepted me. People made me feel part of a team. I gained confidence and my social skills improved.”

“I had no experience of work at all before this. It has allowed me to gain that experience.”

The mental health and wellbeing of participants was something that also improved to a large extent as placements progressed:

“My anxiety has decreased quite a bit – I used to avoid social interaction with other parents at pick-up. After a month or two in the placement I would have more conversations, engage with other kids and parents. It has improved my confidence. I felt part of a team in the kitchen and benefitted from colleagues support.”

“I have realised what I need for life balance and spending time with the kids. The placement made me realise it is important to work and good for my mental health to get out the house.”

There has also been significant improvement in family life with parents being able to earn – this has been both materially but also mentally and being able to replicate skills from the school kitchen into the home:

“Earning has helped me to get myself driving and fund extra costs associated with that. It is also less stressful having extra money and paying off debts.”

“My son speaking about ‘mummy work’ made me feel proud. I feel like I am teaching him that’s what adults do.”

There are plans to roll the project out again next year with agreement in principle between key partners (Catering and Cleaning and Youth and Employability). This will be dependent on external funding.

While the impact on participants was significant last year, the feedback from staff and participants did reveal areas of improvement including longer lead-in time to allow staff to best identify the right setting for each participant, clearer communications plans for trainees and more involvement in the process from colleagues in Catering and Cleaning.

There have also been discussions about broadening out the scope of the project to include other employers or work settings such as child and social care. This will be reliant on staff and employers committing to this process and offering the same flexibility as before.

Early Adopter Communities – Testing Approaches to Rural Childcare

The Early Adopter Communities Project is funded by the Scottish Government and aims to design and test local, place-based approaches to childcare in Shetland. This is an experimentation project to inform the development of national policy which explores how best to meet childcare needs of families in remote and rural areas.

Learning from Shetland's involvement will inform the Scottish Government's plans for future childcare provision in Scotland.

A key focus of the Early Adopter Communities work is to gather insights and learning about the needs of the six priority family groups:

- Lone-parent families
- A household where someone is disabled
- Families with three or more children
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year old
- Families where the mother is under 25 years of age

Currently, there are 4 regulated out-of-school-clubs (OOSCs) operating across Shetland. These are:

- Brae OOSC
- Sandwick OOSC
- Islesburgh OOSC
- Dunrossness OOSC

The current school aged childcare offer in place in Shetland is limited and unaffordable for many families, particularly for families on a low income and those within the key priority family groups.

As part of the Project, the clubs now offer a 50% discounted rate for childcare payments to families in the key priority groups, as well as families receiving Universal Credit and/or Free School Meals. This ensures that all families have improved access to out-of-school care provision.

Additionally, the Early Adopter Communities Project has supported the recruitment of additional Early Learning and Childcare support workers in Mid-Yell ELC and Baltasound ELC until March 2026. This has increased the number of paid 2-year-old places and strengthened service reliability for families. In the North Isles, where access to childcare for younger children has historically been limited, Early Adopter Communities support has ensured consistent staffing and reliable provision, resulting in 100% of 2-year-olds in Yell attending the local ELC setting.

Maximising the Support Available for Families to Live Dignified Lives and Meet their Basic Needs

Cost of Living Campaign and Support (24/25)

In 2024, Shetland Islands Council received £222,000 funding from the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund for the third consecutive year. The fund was started in 2022 by the Scottish Government to provide financial support to the country's six island councils to help their communities, due to the higher cost of living in the islands as opposed to the mainland.

The money is distributed to the island authorities based on population, with the goal of helping to fight poverty. The focus is on community need and working in partnership with community groups and organisations.

Shetland Islands Council used its funding in 24/25 in the following ways:

Scheme to provide local with extra income to families. This meant two payments were made to households with children in receipt of Free School Meals & School Clothing Grant (from 2+ years):



- **£120 to 669 children/young people from 366 families in the week before Christmas.**
- **£163 to 686 children/young people from 372 families on 28th March 2025.**

The impact of these payments has made a huge difference to families:

“With electricity prices going up, it's meant I've not had to worry about keeping my house warm over the winter. The payments have also meant I've not had to stress as much with two teenagers rapidly growing out of clothes and shoes!”

“The payment assists in paying for heating oil and winter clothing, through the harsh winter period . It also aids transport costs in taking my child to and from sports clubs run through winter period for social interaction, whilst unable to play outdoors.”

“Knowing the winter payment is coming means I know that at least the kids can have good food. I could spend the payment on other things, or squirrel it away for emergencies, but because I know it is given to us for my kids' welfare so they can eat well then I choose to spend it on healthy food for them - fresh salads and more expensive fruit and veg that we wouldn't otherwise afford.”



Funding was also used to provide roll out of **free school breakfasts to secondary schools/departments** between October 2024 and March 2025. It was made a universal offer to remove stigma to those who needed it most.

Over 15,000 Breakfasts were served in the two terms with young people feeling it brought them closer together and started the day on a positive note. Head Teachers felt it had improved attendance figures and by being free to all it helped to level the playing field as anyone could go. Teachers reported improved focus and concentration and felt it was important that breakfasts were available during morning break as many children must get bussed in.

Resources and Community Pop Ins over the Winter were laid on for anyone who wanted to attend. These were delivered in community halls across Shetland. This provided a warm space for anyone to drop in for a cuppa, some food and company. Some sessions provided opportunities to join in with fun activities, e.g. crafts and games, hear from visiting agencies or access sports clothing from the Kit for All initiative. All sessions provided information, support and signposting around cost of living, including access to food vouchers, support with the completion of benefit check forms, access to free period products, clothes and other essential items.



A total of 23 partner agencies (services, community organisations and businesses) supported or helped in the delivery of the sessions, including – Citizens Advice Bureau, Schools Catering and Cleaning Team, Women’s Aid, Tesco, Relationship Scotland, Anchor for Families, Home Energy Scotland, RSPB and Transition Turrifield.

- In total, **93 Community Pop-ins were delivered in 22 venues across Shetland**, between October 2024 and March 2025.
- Sessions were attended by a total of **1127 people, including 251 children, with an age range from a few months old to 80+ years.**
- 11 individuals were supported to complete benefit check forms, 12 individuals were issued with food vouchers, 6 individuals were referred on for fuel vouchers, 15 individuals were referred to other agencies for more specific support.

Organising staff also observed:

- Increased social connections: many people reported that pop-ins were the highlight of their week, and got them out of the house, in amongst other people.
- Others reported that they felt less alone after being able to speak about challenges around cost of living and health with other people.
- Some people expressed that they are now able to speak more freely about cost-of-living challenges and seek support.
- Loneliness and isolation: many people openly expressed that they are lonely and how it was good to have somewhere to go without the pressure to pay or to have to join a club or group.
- Health and wellbeing: there were many conversations about bereavement, mental health, and changes in personal circumstance, with people expressing gratitude for the chance to speak.

Funding helped support the Council’s Catering and Cleaning Team to provide **free Christmas Dinner to households on low income or at risk of isolation during Xmas Day**. Up to 110 Christmas dinners were prepared and these were delivered by volunteers to households in Lerwick, Scalloway, Gulberwick, Bressay and Burra. A small selection box was also gifted along with this.

It also provided **food and hot drinks/snacks at the Youth Hub in Lerwick** which were used by 187 people through the year using the Hub as a safe space to ‘hang out’ (including nights in Winter) and where Employability Pathway learners (any age between 12-67) take part in classes and learning activities.

Up to 40 young people attended the later drop-in evening sessions per night and partnership work also started with OPEN, hosting their 'Cafe' night one evening per week.

A small amount of money was also used to **support families in stressful situations** through the Authority's Anchor for Families team. This included support for miscellaneous items, such as electric blankets, for families.

Outdoor Clothes Swap Shetland Islands Council, Sport and Leisure & RSPB

Staff from Shetland Islands Council and RSPB Shetland organised an Outdoor Clothing Swap in November 2024, which aimed to remove barriers to nature in the winter by redistributing unwanted outdoor clothing. The goal was to make sure that anyone who needed outdoor clothing such as jackets could access them; and to promote getting in touch with nature and the benefits of being outside.



RSPB Shetland had noted that many people attending nature events did not have appropriate outdoor clothes. Collaborating with staff involved with the Council's Sport and Leisure Services 'Kit for All' initiative, the Community Learning and Development team and the Active Schools team, an appeal was launched for donations of outdoor clothing alongside the donation and collection of sports clothes which Kit for All already facilitates. People were invited to donate coats, jackets, waterproofs, boots, hats, scarves and gloves for all ages.

The Outdoor Clothing Swap Shop was free and took place at the Gilbertson Park Games Hall in Lerwick on a Sunday in November, taking into account daylight, bus and ferry times. Half of the hall had the clothes swap, and the other half had organisations in attendance to share information about various support services available throughout the isles over the winter months. Anchor for Families, Living Well Hub, Mind Your Head, Community Connections, RSPB Shetland, NHS Health Improvement and Ability Shetland came to the event. Tea and coffee was available, as well as a soft play area for children. Shetland Aid and Tesco also supported the event by donating clothes hangers and rails.

Over 400 people attended the event and feedback was very positive. Workers reported powerful conversations taking place between attendees and partners, alongside attendees being grateful and overwhelmed with how the event had helped make winter more manageable for them. One attendee commented on the usefulness of the event when their family member was waiting to be paid, had high bills and could not have otherwise afforded appropriate outdoor clothing. Other feedback includes:

"The clothes swap was a huge success and a reminder of how generous the Shetland community is. One thing that stood out for me was that there was no economic divide and everyone was treated with the same dignity and respect. Well done."

"Many people asked if the event was going to happen again! Others also mentioned the financial benefit and how they are able to get their kids winter jackets and that was a huge weight lifted especially before Christmas."

"My son is growing so fast that his jackets are always too small. It's so helpful not to have to buy new, and to know he will get the benefit before he outgrows it"

With some clothing left at the end of the event and donations coming in afterwards, the team brought outdoor clothing to community events and drop ins across Shetland, run by the Community Learning and Development team, therefore reaching more communities throughout the winter.

The Swap Shop was designed to be inclusive for everyone. The team observed that as events like this gain popularity, offering affordable and eco-friendly alternatives to traditional shopping, they tend to carry less stigma. This appears to help higher attendance compared to other free events, which are often less well-attended and might otherwise miss helping those in need. The team plan to run the event again next year, possibly with more services attending, alongside a local sponsor.

With a focus on free outdoor clothing during the winter in Shetland, the initiative helped many people including families to reduce their costs of living with more money available for other needs. Taking away the barrier of not having outdoor clothing should also contribute to children and families being able to access free physical activity and to spend time in nature.

Easing the Cost of going 'Back to School'

Shetland Islands Council, Community Development Team (and Partners)

Shetland Islands Council's Community Learning and Development, Sport and Leisure, Youth and Employability, and Anchor for Families Teams organised a 'Back to School' Event at the Stoney Hill Hall in Lerwick in August. The event aimed to address the cost of the school day, drawing inspiration from a similar initiative in another local authority and training provided by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), which was attended by a local Community Involvement and Development Officer.

Various support services were available to help families prepare for the new school year. Workers from the Adult Learning team demonstrated healthy snack and packed lunch ideas and assisted parents on how to use a new Parent Pay system for school lunches. Anchor for Families promoted their support services, while every person who attended received a SIC Children's Services Support for Pupils leaflet detailing benefits available to families. The Youth and Employability team promoted the Young Scot card explaining how it can be used to access discounts or free services and introduced their new employability scheme for parents. Sport and Leisure Services' Kit for All, which facilitates donation and collection of sports and outdoor wear to those who feel they need it was present, along with books from Shetland Library and clothes from Shetland Aid. Tesco donated school socks, t-shirts, packed lunches and bottles and NHS Oral Health team donated resources on oral health and free toothbrushes and toothpaste.

The Back to School event followed on from Community Planning and Development's summer pop-in events, which were held in various communities around the isles. Around 30 people attended, and everyone left with something, whether it was a t-shirt, school bag, or inspiration for making healthy lunches. The team felt that attendees were engaged, with questions about how to get involved in clubs and the activities promoted by Active Schools. There was positive feedback on the healthy snack and packed lunch ideas. One attendee commented that they were unsure if such events were 'for them', indicating a stigma or uncertainty around free events. Overall, the team felt that the event was successful and plan to promote it more widely next time.

This event contributes to the costs of living driver by helping to ensure families can meet basic needs, with free schoolbags, clothes, and other supplies. It may also help contribute to income

from employment and social security and benefits in kind with the support from Youth Services and Anchor for Families both being in attendance at the event.

Income Maximisation and Advice through SICAB (24/25) Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau



With the Cost of Living such a prevalent factor in Shetland life and with poverty a complex and often hidden issue for families, it is increasingly important that people are aware of their entitlements, offers of financial support out there and supported to maximise their income and reduce living costs. This especially applies to priority groups such as households with a disability and with children under 1 year old.

Last year Shetland's Citizens Advice Bureau supported **1672 individuals in Shetland (690 of these new to their service advising on 7689 issues** with over half of these around benefits (as well as other issues such as utilities, debt, tax and many more).

Last year a **£1,978,379 gain was achieved for 561 clients** supported by CAB. This included **£1,820,996** gained through successful benefit applications, appeals, and back payments and over a million was Over £1m of this was for disability benefits, which provide extra money for children, working age adults and pensioners with long term physical or mental health conditions or disabilities.

Below is a real anonymised example to demonstrate what this support can look like locally for parents who are in difficult situations or circumstances:

A client in her early 20's, single parent with a baby, came to SICAB as she was struggling financially. She had mental health difficulties with anxiety and post-natal depression, and her financial worries exacerbated these.

Having checked her Universal Credit Journal to make sure that she was receiving the correct amount of benefit, they noted her Housing Element (towards her rent) was reduced because she had a spare bedroom. Advisors helped her apply to Shetland Islands Council for a Discretionary Housing Payment of £77 per month to plug this shortfall. As she is in receipt of Universal Credit, she was advised she would be entitled to claim the Scottish Child Payment from Social Security Scotland. This is a payment of £26.70 per week for any child aged under 16. The client was also entitled to claim the Best Start Grant for Pregnancy and Baby Payment. This is a one-off payment of £754.65 for a first child but must be claimed before the baby is 6 months old. This grant is to help with the additional costs of having a baby.

The client's mental health had impacted on her ability to manage day-to-day tasks and plan and follow journeys, so she was advised and assisted to apply for Adult Disability Payment – a non means-tested benefit to help with the additional costs of living with a disability. The client was awarded the Daily Living, and Mobility components, both at the standard rate. This added a further £104.45 per week to her income, which would not affect her Universal Credit Award. Finally, she was offered referrals for food parcels and electricity tokens, to alleviate financial pressure whilst her benefit claims were being processed.

As a consequence of SICAB advice, the client's financial situation has been significantly improved.

Supporting the Next Generation to Thrive

Shetland Youth Voice Transport Forum

ZetTrans and Shetland Youth Voice

Shetland Youth Voice is a youth-led organization for young people aged 12-25 in Shetland that aims to empower them to participate in community decision-making. The group provides a platform for young people to have their views heard locally, nationally, and internationally on important issues like transport, mental health, and public spaces, fostering leadership and advocacy within the community.



Transport was voted as the Shetland Youth Voice's number one priority last year with members identifying it as essential to education, employment, and social life, as well as influencing whether young people stay in Shetland long-term. Therefore the organisation held a Transport Summit in January 2025 bringing together 38 young people and 14 key partners aboard the MV Hjatland to tackle this priority. The event was designed to give young people a direct say on bus, ferry, and air travel issues — and to ensure decision-makers heard them first-hand. The day saw everyone explore the challenges and co-design solutions with transport leaders, from local councillors to the Chief Executive of Transport Scotland.

The event featured four themed workshops:

- **Transport Connectivity** in Shetland – mapping journeys, identifying gaps in timetables, and discussing integration of bus and ferry services.
- Transport Issues with Cllr. Moraig Lyall – exploring **accessibility, affordability, reliability, and safety**.

School Bus Transport with Brenda Leask (Executive Manager, Schools) – sharing positives and tackling negatives such as overcrowding, behaviour, and vehicle condition.

Air Travel with Loganair – discussing costs, reliability, and proposals for better youth discounts.

Partners included senior SIC staff, national transport officials, and operators such as Loganair and NorthLink Ferries.

Three clear priorities and headline recommendations emerged:

- extend bus schedules (especially Sundays),
- improve young person discounts for off-island travel
- enhance safety on late-night buses.

Shetland Youth Voice members presented their findings to SIC's Environment and Transport Committee, as well as to Scottish Government Minister for Transport and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie MSP. This secured praise from councillors and a commitment to explore potential changes.

The activity also boosted young people's feelings of empowerment. Feedback scores showed high enjoyment (8.1/10) and strong perceived learning (7.9/10), with participants reporting greater confidence to speak up (8.0/10).

The Summit demonstrated the value of holding youth-led, topic-specific events in partnership with decision-makers. Next steps include following up with SIC and transport providers on agreed actions, continuing to monitor progress, and feeding recommendations into ongoing studies such as the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity programme.

This work contributes is a first step to addressing the barriers of transport to young people in being able to thrive in their community, to participate fully in community activities, education and work.

This is part of wider engagement ZetTrans are doing which is increasing the usage of public bus transport since the roll out of free bus travel for Under 22s in Scotland three years ago.

In 2024/25, **218,015 journeys were made in Shetland under the scheme** (an increase of 27,192 the year before).

Batch Cooking Workshops – Promoting healthy, affordable meals and cooking skills (Taste of Shetland with various partners)

With the cost of living increasing dramatically in recent years, several partners had spoken about the need to promote **eating well on a budget and reducing food waste** – especially with some of our young people and families.

In November 2024, Taste of Shetland partnered with cookbook author and online food personality Suzanne Mulholland, a.k.a. “The Batch Lady”, to deliver a series of batch cooking workshops in Shetland. The project was supported and attended by Shetland Islands Council's Youth and Employability Service, Anchor for Families, and other local partners. Together, they aimed to make healthy, homecooked meals more accessible, encourage the use of local produce, and help people overcome barriers such as cost and time pressures.

The idea came from a chance meeting between Taste of Shetland's Marian Armitage and Suzanne at the Royal Highland Show. They were keen to do something in Shetland with the public. The Taste of Shetland team then collaborated to develop smaller-scale, inclusive events focused on young people and supported families. Together, they saw the potential for practical, hands-on cooking experiences – rather than simply providing recipes – to help people fill their freezers with healthy food while building skills and confidence. The workshops also addressed stigma, showing that food insecurity can affect families regardless of income.

The programme included:

- Two public evening workshops at Scalloway Public Hall and Bigton Community Hall.
- A private youth session with SIC Youth and Employability Services, where participants made budget friendly meals such as Spaghetti Bolognese and Chilli con Carne, portioned into freezer bags. Youths also received slow cookers, cookbooks and leftover ingredients to take home.
- A family-focused session in partnership with Anchor for Families, providing a relaxed and inclusive environment.

“We were so pleased that Suzanne's workshops were so well attended by the public, but we are especially proud to have been able to provide the private workshops which were more accessible to those who needed them.”

Suzanne demonstrated six recipes – from filo fish pie and Korean lamb to vegetarian gnocchi bake – combining premium Shetland ingredients from producers such as Scalloway Meat Company, Shetland Farm Dairies, Cooke Aquaculture, and Shetland Seafood Auctions with affordable supermarket staples.

Nearly 90 people attended the public workshops (exceeding expectations and demonstrating an appetite from families to learn and use these skills. Smaller, community-based sessions were particularly well received for their approachable, down-to earth atmosphere.

The workshops demonstrated how batch cooking can:

- Support ‘freezer literacy’ – making best use of freezer space with clearly-labelled, ready-to-eat meals.
- Reduce food costs while promoting healthier eating habits.
- Increase use of high quality local produce in everyday cooking.
- Build cooking skills, particularly for young people and families.
- Strengthen community connections through shared, informal learning.



“When we heard that the young folk were being gifted the slow cookers by Bridges I was so delighted - it felt like the sessions would really have a lasting effect for the people who came along.”

The workshops highlighted a range of benefits – from tackling stigma around food insecurity to building cooking confidence, promoting the use of local produce, and showing how batch cooking can save time and money. Smaller scale, locally hosted events proved effective in creating a welcoming environment for a wide mix of participants. There is interest in continuing this accessible, informal approach at locations across Shetland to further encourage healthy, affordable cooking and stronger community connections.

Summer Vocational Activities to combat isolation Developing Young Workforce and SIC's Youth Development Team

This bespoke activity was aimed at pupils across schools in Shetland who are experiencing social and economic barriers, including isolation connecting them with social and learning activities and connecting them with local employers across the whole of Shetland.

For the last few years, Shetland's Youth and Employability staff members have been aware that school holiday period can be a time where the effects of struggling family life, child poverty and rural isolation are exacerbated.

A similar gap has also been observed by the local Developing Young Workforce noting some young people in the community not having the same knowledge of the working world in Shetland and what opportunities there might be – this could be due to remote nature of where they live, lack of employment connections in their family or lack of confidence/self-esteem.



Data has shown that some young people in Lerwick has neither been outside of town nor visited our outer islands, due to family's socioeconomic barriers. It was an aim for this summer programme to ensure this particular group of young people experienced a variety of employers across Shetland, including the North Isles.

The Youth Development Team collaborated with DYW to design a bespoke, summer engagement for a targeted group of young people across Shetland. Their ages ranged from 13-16 years of age. 15 pupils were offered and 10 pupils took part in the activities. The young people came from backgrounds experiencing rural inequality and socioeconomic inequalities, some also with additional support needs.



The summer programme ran for six weeks with one day per week dedicated to employer engagement and visits. Employers across Shetland were approached with the request for workplace visits, with some employer challenges, talks on careers, pathways and qualifications, with an opportunity to ask questions and have a chat about jobs and roles. Industries included Tourism, Culture and Heritage, Recreation, Aviation, Fire and Rescue service, Animal Care and Rescue and Creative with input from the likes of Glansin Glass in Unst, Highlands and Islands Airport Limited in Sumburgh and Hillswick Wildlife Centre.

The main objective of these engagements was to give the pupils the opportunity to make links with employers, understand how businesses run and the careers available in each sector. Each employer discussed careers and pathways. This created an opportunity to network and build relationships and work on their skills development. It allowed pupils to explore careers in a safe environment and gave an opening to ask questions and expand their knowledge of opportunities local to them. The pupils were collected by bus and taken to a variety of employers throughout Shetland and ended with an overnight stay in Bridge end outdoor adventure centre.

Youth workers stayed with pupils through each engagement creating an opportunity for an overnight stay where they focused on Meta skills, team working, cooking skills, making beds and a chance to make friends, build relationships and work on social skills in a safe environment. This gave parents some respite and pupils a break from home life. This engagement was designed to have open conversations with young people and support them in developing their employability skills and showcasing opportunities available to young people locally.

The pupils got to experience a variety of environments, meet local employers and start to network and build their links within the community. They used a variety of Meta skills to communicate with employers and each other, such as curiosity, collaboration, creativity, problem solving and adapting and focusing. This has helped to start building confidence around the world of work.

Staff noted the young people grew in confidence with each employer engagement. They asked questions and started to work on their social skills and employability knowledge and skills. Their social skills and team work grew throughout the summer and was highlighted by the curiosity and questions they asked. Their friendships grew and they are still in contact with other young people in the group which has built confidence. Their relationship with DYW and the Youth Work Team has grown and formed a positive bond to explore future plans.

All pupils also gained accreditation through the summer through a Hi 5 Award (A Youth Scotland Award at SCQF level 2) with Youth Development workers supporting them to do this.

Pupil:

“This is really calm, I have never made my own pizza”

“I forgot how fun it is to work with ponies and be outside.”

“I would like to come back I did not know this was here.”

“I am delighted how calm and confident this young person is and he can come back anytime.” (employer)

In previous years Summer Activities have been less skill focused and doing it this way has been more beneficial for young people. They are trying new things and learning life skills. In the past the effort was more into making something enjoyable for young people. This way means they still enjoy it but are also gaining skills.

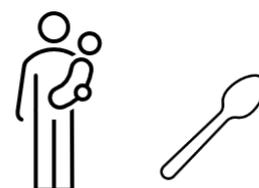
Focusing on meaningful and skill based experiences will now be the focus of Summer activities moving forward. At the end of the session the feedback from young people was that they enjoyed the sessions and that each session was worthwhile. The team has planned and delivered similar sessions for Summer 2025.

The partnership working meant a wide range of activities were offered, young people experienced different working environments and different areas of Shetland and gained skills.

Due to nature of the young people involved, a relatively high number of staff are required to facilitate the activities and transport the young people from various areas of the isles. This is at a time when staff often feel they should use annual leave due to school commitments. Partnership working and pooling resources between services could be a possible solution to this.

Starting Solid Foods Workshops (NHS Shetland)

In Shetland, the introduction of Starting Solids workshops as a standard offer to all families marks a significant shift in how early years support is delivered. Led by NHS Shetland’s Health Improvement Team through the HENRY programme, these workshops aim to provide high-quality, evidence-based guidance on introducing solid foods to babies—without relying on families to seek help or referrals.



Historically, additional support to standard Health Visiting advice around weaning and starting solids was often accessed reactively, with families needing to identify a concern or request advice. The new approach recognises that every family benefits from clear, consistent information and reassurance during this important developmental stage. By offering workshops universally, Shetland is helping to provide timely support, normalising the need, reduce stigma, and promote confident, informed parenting.

The Starting Solids workshops are designed to be practical and inclusive. They cover key topics such as recognising when a baby is ready for solids, choosing appropriate first foods, understanding hunger and fullness cues, and making mealtimes enjoyable. Delivered in a relaxed group setting, the sessions also provide opportunities for parents to share experiences and build peer support networks.

Importantly, the workshops are now offered as a standard part of early years support, with health visitors promoting the workshops directly with families and general media promotion by Health Improvement, making the sessions open to all and not just the families who ask for help. This proactive model ensures that all parents and carers—regardless of background or confidence level—have access to trusted advice at the right time. It also helps prevent misinformation and anxiety around feeding, which can be common during the transition to solids.

The workshops are part of a wider suite of HENRY sessions available in Shetland, including topics like fussy eating, healthy teeth, and eating well on a budget. Together, these resources reflect a whole-family approach to health and wellbeing, supporting parents to make informed choices and build positive habits from the start.

Feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive, with many reporting increased confidence and reduced stress around feeding. All those who are part of the child's care are welcome; many grandparents have joined in the group session to update their knowledge and skills too. The group format also helps reduce isolation, particularly for first-time parents or those without extended family nearby.

By embedding Starting Solids workshops into routine early years support, NHS Shetland is demonstrating a commitment to prevention, inclusion, and empowerment. This approach aligns with national priorities around early intervention and supports the wider goal of improving outcomes for children and families across Shetland. It is important that services such as Health Visiting are given the time and resource to provide prevention and early intervention support effectively, the value of which has been proven in this model.

Widening access to thrive through Coastal Communities Fund

24/25

Economic Development, Shetland Islands Council



The Coastal Communities Fund grant scheme is funded by Shetland Islands Council from revenues received from the allocation of Crown Estate net revenues. The scheme is designed to mobilise change and deliver positive outcomes for Shetland and its communities, by supporting projects which encourage investment in infrastructure, community capacity building, development of community assets and inclusive growth – that is, growth which combines **improved wellbeing with greater equality, creates opportunities for all, and distributes the benefits of increased prosperity fairly**. The scheme also aims to encourage regeneration of Shetland's communities by

supporting projects that **safeguard sustainable economic growth and jobs, promote inclusion and contribute towards poverty reduction.**

Projects seeking funding must be a strong fit to the Shetland Partnership Plan 2018 – 2028 and the shared vision that:

“Shetland is a place where everyone is able to thrive; living well in strong, resilient communities; and where people and communities are able to help plan and deliver solutions to future challenges”

Applicants must demonstrate how their project will drive change for Shetland and deliver on the Partnership priorities, namely:

Place – “Shetland is an attractive place to live, work, study & invest”

Participation – “People participate and influence decisions or services and use of resources”

People – “Individuals and families thrive and reach their full potential”

Money – “All households can afford to have a good standard of living”

Applications are open to Shetland based organisations with an open constitution or set of rules that clearly define the organisation’s aims, objectives and procedures. Applications can be accepted from registered charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, public sector bodies (other than the Council), and collective interest / industry wide bodies (e.g. bodies which represent an economic sector rather than a private interest).

Since it opened in 2020, the Coastal Communities Fund has supported 106 projects across Shetland, with total grants awarded if just over £5.1m. Projects have been supported in almost all areas of Shetland, with a mix of capital and revenue grants awarded to a wide range of projects. Applicants have included community halls and centres, sports and leisure clubs, community and history societies, local development organisations, wildlife charities, tourism organisations, industry bodies and more. Grants awarded have supported improvements to local community assets such as halls, centres, playing fields, marinas and museums, resourcing of initiatives to support young people, befriending and sport development, and support for research into the natural environment and climate change. The fund is administered by the Economic Development Service and Community Planning & Development team.

In 2024/25, the Coastal Communities Fund supported 20 projects, with a total grant commitment of £1,159,600.84. Below are three examples showing a range of ways in which the grant can widen access and opportunities removing barriers for families to participate and mitigating against people’s circumstances:

Shetland Recreational Trust - Hammer Cage - Safety Upgrade and Inclusion Works: Shetland Recreational Trust were awarded £21,951.75 of funding to upgrade the hammer cage at the Clickimin Leisure Complex to become an all-inclusive facility for all seated throws events (club throw, discus, javelin and shot put), meeting all disability requirements and enabling the local athletics club to offer inclusive athletics to athletes of all abilities. Prior to the upgrade, individuals with a disability were unable to participate in athletics throw events which put Shetland athletes at a disadvantage in accessing athletic competitions. As this is the only facility of its kind in Shetland, funding will support the development of future athletes and provide new opportunities for participation in disabled sport.

Royal Voluntary Service - Shetland Inclusive Transport: Funding of £53,108.46 was awarded to Royal Voluntary Service to purchase a new wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) and to employ a driver on a part time basis for one year. This project will provide a huge change in the quality of

life of individuals across Shetland who currently are unable to access services and activities due to transport barriers. With enhanced mobility options available, individuals can explore new opportunities, access essential services more easily and engage in activities that they enjoy, leading to more fulfilling and inclusive lifestyles. Royal Voluntary Service intend to sustain the service by recruiting and training volunteer drivers going forward after the initial one-year part-time driver contract expires.

Bressay Developments Ltd - Speldiburn Refurbishment: Funding of £11,070 was awarded to Bressay Development Ltd to enable the organisation to progress the design phase of a project to improve facilities at the Speldiburn Community Hub on the island of Bressay. The Hub is a hugely important local resource and is currently home to a café, a ‘Good as New’ shop, an art and craft shop, a gallery, three studios, rental spaces, while also providing space for a range of community support and wellbeing services including a weekly ‘Living Well Hub’, a social club, and a base for visiting NHS services. As almost all employment opportunities – as well as all medical care, education, and training – are located off island, requiring a ferry journey, the presence of a community hub on Bressay plays a key role in addressing vulnerabilities.

Developing our Workforce to respond to family/child’s needs

Trauma Informed Services and Staff
(Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland Workforce Development)

Alongside the three overarching aims of supporting parents into work, families living dignified lives/meeting their basic needs and supporting the next generation to thrive, it is important that staff in our organisations display values and skills to work with diverse needs and potentially sensitive situations.

Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland acknowledge the importance of developing staff knowledge, skills and confidence to ensure that the workforce across Shetland is able to recognise where a person may be affected by trauma and can work in a way that minimises distress and maximises trust. There is an inherent link between how our workforce approach families and individuals with trauma and those living in poverty. In order to create trauma informed and responsive change it was recognised that capacity needed to be built locally to ensure sustainability.

Traumatic experiences affect most people at some stage in life, yet we often won’t know about people’s experiences, and the impact of trauma is unique to each of us. Trauma has consistently been associated with poorer outcomes across the widest range of areas including preventable disease, mental health, education, social outcomes, and many more. 1 in 7 Scottish adults report experiencing four or more adverse events (including traumatic experiences such as emotional, physical and sexual abuse) before age 18 (Scottish Health Survey, 2019).

Trauma can impact our ability to feel safe in relationships, to manage strong emotions, and to view ourselves as worthwhile. Many settings can unwittingly provoke strong reminders of the trauma that has been experienced. For these reasons, and many more, trauma can create invisible barriers to accessing services and the opportunities that organisations can offer.



Although many of us will experience some form of traumatic event in the course of our lives, the majority of people will recover well, through supportive,

positive relationships with family, friends, colleagues, people in their community and service professionals. Positive supportive relationships are at the heart of a trauma informed approach.

A crucial aspect of this work is to ensure that staff feel their wellbeing is valued, prioritised and have time and space to access relevant proactive and reactive support. Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland want to ensure that our staff are in an environment where everyone experiences the five key principles of trauma-informed and responsive practice at work. There must also be appropriate proactive prevention of vicarious trauma, chronic stress, burnout.

Six staff from within the Council undertook the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) *Trauma Skilled – Transforming Connections Train the Trainer* course during June 2024. They then delivered their first in person Trauma Skilled – Transforming Connections courses during February 2025 with 39 staff attending.

The focus of the sessions was around:

- Building and repairing relationships
- Helping people with their reactions to traumatic experiences
- Looking after ourselves as we look after others
- Hearing about experiences of trauma.

Staff taking part came from services where a large cross-section of the public are seen day-to-day (Housing, Environmental Health, Maternity, Pupil Support Teachers, Newly Qualified Social Workers, Family Support Workers, Youth Workers and Occupational Therapists). These areas were chosen based on their role and that in the course of their work they will have contact with people who may have been affected by trauma. These areas had also developed readiness to engage in the work with a strong commitment from managers.

Participants were given pre and post training questionnaires. From the feedback:

- **97% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the training would make a difference to how they work with people affected by trauma.**
- **Confidence in helping people understand how trauma may have impacted them increased from 24% (before session) to 94% (afterwards).**

Qualitative feedback was also very positive with examples below highlighting both the course and the recently trained facilitators:

“excellent and delivered by knowledgeable and approachable trainers”

“Everyone should attend this!”

By having a core group of locally available and responsive Trainers, the model piloted has worked well. Plans for 25/26 include following up with areas already trained to focus on embedding the trauma informed principles and targeting areas which have not been involved so far. This will ensure more services and staff have capacity to work with anyone who may have experienced trauma and are confident to maintain positive relationships with the people services are supporting.

This training has become part of the Council’s core programme of training and will continue to be offered to partners too. In addition to the trauma skilled training, staff were also offered the opportunity to attend the Help for the Helpers - Vicarious Trauma and Self Care Workshop which is provided by external trainers. Workshops took place during March 2025 with 49 staff attending. Through a mixture of information-sharing and practical activities the workshop includes:

- What VT is and isn't
- The significance of empathy
- What are the signs of VT and what increases the risk
- Identifying our own personal resources
- Invisible personality drivers and other obstacles to looking after ourselves
- A framework for looking after ourselves – from global research
- Action planning practical ways to individually apply the framework

Feedback from the workshops:

“The delivery was excellent and very clear. It's an important reminder that we need to look after ourselves and make time to practice self-care”

“I enjoyed the tools - but really enjoyed learning more about what Vicarious Trauma is and how it displays physically”

“The activities were excellent and allowed me an opportunity to reflect”

There was also a series of meetings set up during March 2025 so that the workshop trainers could meet with managers and discuss how to embed the learning and tools from the workshop. The trainers also delivered a short input for our Social Work staff as part of World Social Work Day. They also met with the Council's Workplace Wellbeing Officer to discuss wider staff wellbeing strategy work.

For the next phase, where possible, the local trainers will also provide support with the Trauma Lens approach. This is where organisations and services engage in self-reflection and involve people with lived experience from the outset to improve areas such as access, environment, relationships, partnership working, policies and procedures, communication and language and where appropriate supporting recovery. There will also be further opportunities to attend the Help for the Helpers - Vicarious Trauma and Self Care workshop.

Compassionate Shetland – Human Library Sessions (Shetland and Shetland CLD Partnership)

The Shetland Partnership is a community planning partnership that brings together various local partners and community bodies in Shetland to work collectively towards improving the lives of residents. Its primary goal is to reduce inequality and achieve shared vision for the islands.

They aim for Shetland to be a place where, no matter their circumstances, residents will be respected and supported by the community to fulfil their potential. To do this, we need a Shetland community that appreciates diversity and is accepting of each individual's background and circumstances – such examples could include priority groups such as families with young children, families on low income, disabilities or neurodiversity.

Research shows stigma is still a significant barrier to people accessing early support or participating in their community. Therefore, there is a need for:

- **Shetland's communities, services and industry adapting their approach, supporting everyone, regardless of their need or status.**
- **Taking away the 'shame' from individuals in Shetland when seeking support.**

The Shetland Partnership and other key stakeholders are trying to tackle these long-term goals by:

- **Increasing awareness of the impact of stigma to employees across the public and third (and finally private) sector.**

- Increase Employees confidence and willingness to support colleagues and people from diverse needs and backgrounds.
- Make the wider Shetland community more aware and understanding of the power of their own attitudes and language. One of the barriers to people receiving the support they need is stigma.

As part of raising awareness and skills in staff and leadership on the diverse backgrounds and stories held by the people we try to help, CPD sessions by the Human Library were facilitated to members of the Shetland Partnership, Shetland Childrens Partnership and Shetland's Community Learning and Development Partnership.

The [Human Library](#) concept is about having open, honest and (at times) challenging conversations with people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. It was developed in Copenhagen over 20 years ago but now operates in over 80 countries world-wide.

They offer diversity, equity and inclusion training for companies/organisations that wish to better incorporate social understanding within their workforce, as well as grow their cultural awareness for deeper partnerships with clients.

Around 50 staff/leaders from Shetland services and partners took part in the experience. Each session was online and featured the chance to have an open honest conversation with an individual who has their own story to tell on a particular theme. Everyone was encouraged to be curious and ask the awkward questions they never felt they could. These individuals ('books') ranged from Transgender, Disability, Holocaust Survivor/Neurodiversity/Bereavement/Obesity and many more with the rationale being to open participant's minds, widen perspective and make them more curious. Participants were not told about who they were going to meet and were not given any preparation for the experience. The overall session lasted 90 minutes.

The evaluations from the session revealed a big impact on people's attitudes. From the responses:

- **All participants agreed or strongly agreed the session had changed the way they interacted with people at work**
- **All participants agreed or strongly agreed it inspired them to a more open minded attitude**
- **89% of participants said they had gained knowledge about a certain group that would help them in the future**
- **All would recommend the experience to a colleague and all would be interested in doing it again**

Participant statements were anonymised but here are a few below:

"Hearing lived experience has lodged things I knew into theory into a different space in my head/heart because I heard the story not just a theoretical evidence base."

"Learned the importance of getting to know someone - to listen well (and how exhausting that is), and not make assumptions. We don't do enough of that."

When asked about what they would do next:

"Be curious about people's stories and be ready to hear them."

"judging less...consciously trying to do this"

“explore with colleagues how we can get further access to the Human Library, and on a personal note, to be more human, to make the space to really listen, hear and try to understand and meet people where they are much more”

Overall the sessions were powerful for participants with rich learning and emotive experiences. It is a powerful tool for helping change hearts and minds and reminding people of the power of lived experience and considering people’s stories or ‘unjudging’ when working with people in our community (and colleagues). These are all skills and approaches key to reaching out and accepting families who may be experiencing poverty or symptoms of social exclusion. Due to this emotional impact for some, it would be recommended to make sure people are clearing enough time to decompress after sessions and get the chance to meet in person to discuss the experience. This was offered in both sessions by Shetland Partnership support staff and was appreciated by those in attendance.

Some of the Partnership organisations have now been in touch with the Human Library regarding hosting sessions for their own operational staff. For example, University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) recently held a session for their in-service day in June 2025.

The sessions have also made people reflect on whether Shetland could upskill and empower lived experience to find a voice and willing listeners. Work is being taken from some services and partners on how best to capture this in way that still supports/protects individuals.

Money Worries Training Development (NHS Shetland)

Worrying about money can have a big impact on health. With the cost of living rising, many families in the community are feeling the emotional strain of poverty and making ends meet. Often they don’t reach out for support - this can be for a number of reasons, including the fear of being stigmatised in a close-knit/rural community.

Money Worries training equips staff with the skills and confidence to raise the subject of money with individuals and talk about their financial concerns. It also provides the knowledge needed to signpost or refer people to services that can help them maximise their income. By starting a conversation about money and understanding available support, staff can make a big difference to someone’s life.

Over the past year, the training has been fully revised and updated. It is short, informal, and delivered either online or in person. The training aims to:

- Increase understanding of poverty and its impact
- Build confidence for Healthcare staff to ask about money worries
- Improve knowledge to support services available for financial matters

The training is aimed at staff who work directly with the public, across both NHS and non-NHS settings. Roll out of the updated training is planned for 2026.

The expected outcome is more frequent and confident conversations about money and income maximisation, helping to reduce the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing.

Complementing the training is the Worrying About Money tool, created in conjunction with the Independent Food Aid Network. The resource is available either as a leaflet or online <https://www.worryingaboutmoney.co.uk/shetland> and offers advice and support for those struggling.

Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Challenges

This report demonstrates the huge amount of activity and effort from various organisations in Shetland to reduce child poverty, mitigate its impact on families and tackle the causes.

The case studies in this report demonstrate this commitment from organisations, communities and staff as well as a willingness to work in partnership. Poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue which includes a combination of social, economic and psychological factors. Reducing child poverty is therefore a partnership endeavour, and an ethos of working better together will remain central to our approach in the context of less funding, resources, and competing priorities.

Despite the difference that these activities have made to people's lives and a slight reduction in rate this year, child poverty has worsened over the last decade. As we prepare for our next Action Plan in 2026, it is important we are examining the data available to us (both quantitative and qualitative) and that we are listening to the voices of those being affected in our community. It is also vital we continue to adapt and learn from all activity and analyse what worked well, and what could be improved.

We need to continually ask the key questions:

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

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

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

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

In 2024/25, Shetland was awarded funding to become **Fairer Futures** partner. This means supporting public service reform to tackle child poverty. This will support testing new ways of working in collaboration with local authorities and third sector partners so that we can provide holistic support to families in the place and at the time they need it. While the national emphasis of Fairer Futures is on reducing child poverty and driving public service reform, the approach in Shetland will look more broadly at person-centred approaches to reducing inequalities.

Shetland's priority for the coming year focuses on the way services use Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE) processes to deliver person-centred support tailored to individual needs. There will also be work around how we use and share data between organisations and services more effectively, and a learning network will be formed to support practitioners to problem solve and plan more effectively.

Next year will also see development of a new Childrens Partnership Plan, Shetland Local Employability Partnership Delivery Plan as well as Shetland's Poverty Action Plan for the next three years. With so many local and national priorities, it is also important these plans and priorities complement each other and that we connect policy and practice. For example, staff realising the link between UNCRC, Poverty and being Trauma Informed or being more aware of Shetland Partnership and its aims and values.

One of the barriers that we have heard from some services/organisations in making such connections and forward planning is the way some of the activities are funded. While additional resource in the form of external or government funding is welcomed, planning any actions without knowing the extent of resources available year on year has been difficult for some services. The

specific funding conditions have also been cited as limiting some of the scope of the work done in some areas. It is important that we continually feedback to national partners around any limitations in order to make progress on this.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Production of one Report for Shetland (the first covering 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019);
- The Council and NHS Shetland are required to jointly prepare and publish a report, but are encouraged to involve all partners contributing to reducing Child Poverty (through Community Planning);
- Aim to publish by 30th June each year, after local approval by the Council and NHS Shetland;
- Feedback will be provided from the Scottish Government;

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

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

- Links should be made with implementation of the:
 - Fairer Scotland Duty
 - Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
 - Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and
 - Education (Scotland) Act 2016;
- Evidence must be provided that shows consideration is being given to the different barriers that parents with different protected characteristics³ may face and specifically include action to help parents to maximise income, by accessing financial inclusion services;
- Evidence that shows lived experience of poverty is being brought into strategic decision-making;
- In addition, the guidance highlights the following for inclusion:
 - Sharing ‘what’s working’ and ‘lessons’ learnt
 - Reference to work to tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
 - The building and nurturing of relationships across the partnership, and
 - Demonstration of partner involvement in activity to meet poverty targets.

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix 2: Plan for 2023-26

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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