
To: Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

On: 27 March 2024

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Update

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Council and partners have a key focus on tackling inequality and improving wellbeing and have longstanding programmes of work and partnership arrangements in place such as the Tackling Poverty Programme and the change programme established in response to the findings of the Renfrewshire Drug and Alcohol Commission.
- 1.2. At Council on 2 March 2023 members reaffirmed their commitment to the Fairer Renfrewshire programme and outlined a number of investments including bringing together the current Fairer Renfrewshire funding alongside the Tackling Poverty and Social Renewal reserve funds into a single resource.
- 1.3. At Council on 29th February 2024, members further reaffirmed their commitment to the Fairer Renfrewshire programme with further investments in a number of targeted interventions including additional welfare rights funding, a targeted programme of summer activities for children and young people from low-income families, additional resource to explore inequalities experienced by older people and strengthen engagement with young people, and a further winter school clothing payment in 2024.
- 1.4. Work on priorities has continued with this paper containing updates on a number of key priorities at Section 4, as well as an overview of proposals and priorities for 2024 at Section 5.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee note the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 As highlighted in Section 1, the Fairer Renfrewshire Programme brings together a number of existing programmes of work focussed on achieving fairness and equity, including the former Tackling Poverty Programme and Alcohol and Drugs Change Programme. These programmes are being brought together alongside the Council's Social Renewal Plan, mapping a fairer future for Renfrewshire's residents through the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.
- 3.2 There are four key emerging themes which are shared across all elements of the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, and these are:
- Improving financial security
 - Advancing equality of opportunity
 - Building community capacity and resilience
 - Listening to lived experience
- 3.3 Section 4 of this report provides an update on projects for information, whilst section 5 of the paper provides an overview of proposals and priorities within the Fairer Renfrewshire programme for 2024/25.

4. Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Updates

Scottish Government Council Tax Debt Pilot Project

- 4.1 As previously reported, in November 2023, Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (RCAB) approached the Council to collaborate in a Council Tax Debt Pilot funded through the Scottish Government. The pilot focuses on exploring how local Citizens Advice Bureau and local authorities can work together to improve the journey of those who are in council tax arrears or struggling to make council tax payment. The aim is to provide better outcomes for people and for local authorities.
- 4.2 The Council and RCAB have agreed to work collaboratively to ensure that people have the opportunity to improve their financial capability, maximise their incomes and ultimately, in many cases, be better placed to arrive at sustainable arrangements to pay their council tax debts, thus reducing collection costs and the need for enforcement action while supporting and engaging those who may be struggling to pay.
- 4.3 The outcomes of the pilot will be provided through an evaluation report which will cover collate the learnings and achieved outcomes from all three funded areas. Regular meetings have commenced between relevant Council Officers and RCAB staff. At the February meeting a decision was taken to consult with the Fairer Renfrewshire Lived Experience Panel to help improve processes for those who may be struggling to pay Council Tax, identify and understand barriers to accessing support, such as advice and review correspondence associated with

collection of Council Tax as well as potential for enhancing collection processes in general. This meeting will happen on 12 March.

School Support Service

- 4.4 The School Support service provided by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau commenced on at the start of the school year, with the first appointments week commencing 23 August. From that date until the end of February there had been 113 advice appointments/contacts made, and advice provided to 76 individuals.
- 4.5 The busiest schools have been Linwood with 16 appointments, followed by ASN schools, Riverbrae (14) and Mary Russell (13), then Johnstone High (11). Reasons for appointments have been varied, however the majority, 62% have been for support with benefits and benefit checks, with housing the second busiest area at 11% and 7% have come forward for crisis support, such as Foodbank Vouchers.
- 4.6 A meeting will be arranged between Education staff and RCAB to look at how the service is working in general and any changes or improvements that can be made, and to look at how to encourage take up in those schools where appointments have been slower.

Lived Experience Panel

- 4.7 The Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee has been given a number of updates relating to work of the Fairer Renfrewshire Panel.
- 4.8 The first meeting of the Panel this year in January 2023 was used to examine and inform the School Meal Debt process and gain the Panel's insight on this and the associated proposed communications to parents.
- 4.9 As reported at the last Sub-Committee meeting, a sub-group of Renfrewshire's digital partnership, Citizens Voice, has been working to introduce the DigiZone initiative, DigiZones being locations within Renfrewshire where any member of the public can connect to the internet as a minimum, but may also be able to gain digital skills support and access devices. The February Panel was used to discuss this initiative and wider digital exclusion, and the Digital Strategy Delivery Manager, has committed to engaging with the Panel when drafting the next Digital Strategy.
- 4.10 As reported above the Panel meeting on March 12th will feed into the Council Tax Project, with Officers from Renfrewshire Council and the CE of Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau attending to garner the Panel's feedback on barriers to accessing support around Council Tax and current and proposed changes to correspondence. The later March meeting will allow the Panel to catch up with the Convener and Depute of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee.

Community Needs Assessment in Gallowhill

- 4.11 Late in 2023, Renfrewshire HSCP was successful in a funding bid to NHSGGC Public Health to carry out a Community Needs Assessment in Gallowhill. Recognising the increase in Child Poverty rates in the Gallowhill and Renfrew South Ward, a rapid review of the data for Gallowhill has highlighted a number of health indicators which have worsened precipitating the funding bid.
- 4.12 Council Officers have been working with those from Renfrewshire HSCP to pull together a specification for commissioning a local organisation to facilitate a Grassroots Community Needs Assessment in Gallowhill for a six-month period.
- 4.13 The organisation which is commissioned will involve the community in the assessment, which will identify community needs and capture community responses to the health indicators affecting local individuals and families in the area. They will scope existing services, reporting on their findings at the end of the six month period.
- 4.14 A small steering group set up by Renfrewshire HSCP will involve Council Officers and other key partners, such as Public Health.
- 4.15 In advance of this exercise, a partnership session has been organised for 21 March 2024 to discuss and review current information held by services in relation to Gallowhill.

Easter holiday provision

- 4.16 Due to underspend identified within the service, funding has been identified and allocated to provide a focussed programme of holiday activities for children and young people throughout the Easter break.
- 4.17 Camps will be provided across six locations by Community Learning and Development and Street Stuff for children and young people aged 5-14. The camps are free and a hot meal is provided at lunch time. Information and booking for the camps have been shared with key third sector organisations and also on a referral basis from Social Work in order to ensure effective targeting of places to children that need it most.

Thrive under 5

- 4.18 Late in 2023, Renfrewshire HSCP secured Scottish Government Childhood Obesity- Early Intervention and Prevention Funding. The funding is supporting the development and implementation of a 'Thrive under 5' pilot programme. Thrive under 5 is a whole system, community food nurturing approach with families of pre-school children, combining action on food and financial insecurity, healthy eating and physical activity. Following a review of child health and wellbeing data and community assets it was agreed that Thrive under 5 would be piloted in Johnstone with a view to further roll out dependant on the allocation of further funding.

- 4.19 Key elements of the programme will include money and debt advice, provision of fruit and vegetables, free pantry membership and shops, fuel support, cooking classes, provision of cooking equipment and physical activity opportunities.
- 4.20 A steering group has been set up by Renfrewshire HSCP and includes Council Officers from a number of services, including Advice Works and One Ren as well as third sector partners. Representative from Fair Food Renfrewshire are also part of the group. This group will plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the programme. The initial pilot will be delivered by Active Communities with support from Renfrewshire HSCP Health Improvement team. Robust referral pathways will be developed to ensure the programme reaches families who may benefit most.

Fair Food Renfrewshire

- 4.21 The second Fair Food Renfrewshire Steering Group meeting was held in November 2023, with a draft survey being presented for comment and discussion. The survey will enable a baselining exercise to establish the current position within Renfrewshire regarding three priority areas:
- Working to reduce, then eradicate food poverty, by promoting a collaborative approach across all communities, ensuring a dignified and fair access to healthy and affordable food for all.
 - Increased access and availability of growing grounds in every town and village within Renfrewshire.
 - Widen access and availability to educational opportunities regarding nutrition and cooking skills, and wider use of "home economics" type classes within education, health, and community settings.
- 4.22 The survey closed at the end of February, and work is ongoing to analyse results to inform a work plan, which will be discussed at the next Steering Group Meeting on 13 March 2024.
- 4.23 Officers continue to attend relevant national events around Good Food Nation to network, gauge wider views and report back to the Steering Group. This includes sessions around the Scottish Government consultation on the national Good Food Nation Plan, which was published on 24th January. This Plan is the first step to progress food system transformation in Scotland and the consultation covers the content of the first national Good Food Nation Plan, asking views on the national Good Food Nation Outcomes; ways of measuring progress; and how different groups envision life in a Good Food Nation. Officers from across services are involved in drafting a response which will be brought forward to a future Leadership Board.

5. Fairer Renfrewshire Programme – 24/25

- 5.1 At Council on 29th February 2024, members further reaffirmed their commitment to the Fairer Renfrewshire programme with further investments in a number of targeted interventions including:
- additional welfare rights funding, delivered by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau
 - a targeted programme of summer activities for children and young people from low income families, working across Council services with community groups and third sector organisations across Renfrewshire to ensure that our most vulnerable families are able to access a range of activities and healthy food over the summer period

- additional resource to explore inequalities experienced by older people, delivered by ROAR
- strengthened engagement with young people, including the targeting of activities to support our most vulnerable children and young people in Renfrewshire through the development of a youth-led programme
- a further winter school clothing payment in 2024, providing £50 per child eligible for the School Clothing Grant
- continued delivery of the Dolly Parton Imagination library programme, for all children aged between 2-5
- continued delivery of the Who Cares Scotland Communities that Care programme within Renfrewshire's educational establishments, continuing the Council's support for the care experienced community

5.2 Members are asked to note that work is underway to bring forward proposals for Fairer Renfrewshire programme funding to be allocated for 24/25. These relate to previously supported Tackling Poverty funded initiatives as well as new and emerging priorities.

5.3 A paper will be brought to Leadership Board in May 2024 setting out proposed funding allocation for 2024-25. Any projects continuing as part of Fairer Renfrewshire will need to be reviewed and updated to sharpen focus as a poverty intervention and alignment to wider programme, including impact measurement and reporting.

5.4 Key priorities for the Fairer Renfrewshire Programme for March-June 2024 are as follows:

- Evaluation of Winter Connections 23/24
- Development of the Local Child Poverty Action Report
- Developing and delivering budget investments, particularly the design and delivery of the summer holiday programme
- Development of equalities workstream as detailed in February 2024 Leadership Board
- Launch of Renfrewshire Community Survey 2024

Implications of the Report

1. Financial – There are no financial implications associated with this report.
2. HR & Organisational Development – none
3. Community/Council Planning – The Fairer Renfrewshire Programme is a key driver in achieving the 'Fair' strategic outcome and theme within the Council Plan, and covers a number of the key actions identified in the plan. It also represents a significant partnership programme of work which supports the 'Fair' theme within the Community Plan, with dedicated partnership governance being established to ensure alignment between these areas of work.
4. Legal - none
5. Property/Assets - none

6. Information Technology - none
7. Equality and Human Rights – Equality and human rights are a key pillar of this plan, and it is anticipated that the programme will likely advance equality of opportunity.
8. Health and Safety - none
9. Procurement – none
10. Risk – none
11. Privacy Impact – none
12. COSLA Policy Position – none
13. Climate Risk – none

Author: Laura McIntyre, Head of Policy and Partnerships