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**To:** Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

**On:** 15 November 2023

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**Report by:** Chief Executive

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**Heading:** Fairer Renfrewshire Programme

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## **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. Further to this, 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 estimated at £5million.
- 1.3. Work on priorities has continued with this paper containing updates on:
  - Summer of Fun evaluation
  - Advice Services
  - Digital Inclusion
  - Winter Connections Programme
  - School Meal Debt
  - Fairer Renfrewshire Panel

## **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.

## **4. Fairer Renfrewshire Programme**

### **Summer of Fun Evaluation**

- 4.1. In March 2023, core funding of £100,000 was allocated through the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the development of a summer holiday programme, with a focus on providing support over the holiday period to low-income families. £20,000 of funding was also allocated from the Future Paisley programme to enhance cultural experiences for low-income households.
- 4.2. In late June 2023, Renfrewshire received a further £120,655 from the Scottish Government as part of their national programme to enhance summer holiday and food provision. This funding was targeted at providing access to activities, childcare and food during the summer holiday period for school age children from low-income families. This brought the funding total to £240,655 allocated to Renfrewshire's Summer of Fun programme.
- 4.3. A diverse programme was developed to deliver a range of activities for children, families, and young people across Renfrewshire to access over the holidays. This was developed and co-ordinated jointly by the Community Learning and Development and Partnerships and Inequalities team within the Chief Executive's Service, in consultation with the Fairer Renfrewshire sub-committee and the Fairer Renfrewshire Lived Experience Panel. A separate paper on the programme is provided as part of the agenda for this meeting.

### **Advice Services**

- 4.4. Income advice is a key support for households facing financial insecurity, with advice workers able to advise on issues such as benefit entitlement, debt management and budgeting. The Council's Advice Works service provides free, confidential and independent advice on a range of money and debt issues. At the request of the Fairer Renfrewshire Panel, staff from Advice Works attended a Panel session in October to discuss better access and promotion of advice services

and explain what their services does, including confidentiality and independence from other Council services.

### **Special Needs in Pregnancy service**

- 4.5. As previously reported to the Sub-Committee, Renfrewshire Council has been working with Renfrewshire HSCP, NHS GGC and Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau to develop a pilot for an advice and advocacy service within the Special Needs in Pregnancy service (SNIPs) at the Royal Alexandra Hospital and apply for external funding for this service. Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau were recently successful in an application to the National Lottery Improving Lives Fund, and have been awarded £95,000 to run a pilot of the service for one year.
- 4.6. The service, called Stronger Start, will work with pregnant women who have complex needs, including alcohol or substance misuse; medical issues – being HIV positive or having a current mental health problem, who are under 16 or those disengaged from mainstream maternity services and where there are child protection concerns.
- 4.7. It is intended to offer both income maximisation advice, but also individual support and advocacy around a range of issues and will also develop robust referral pathways with partners in the public and third sectors. Due to the geographical area the RAH works across, the service will cover Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire families too.
- 4.8. A Steering Group formed from Renfrewshire Citizens Advice, Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire HSCP along with NHS GGC and Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire HSCPs are now working to put the service in place with a provisional date of January 2024.

### **School Support Service**

- 4.9. 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 October week, 50 appointments had been attended across schools, with numbers around 6 per week. The final week before the holidays showed a marked increase to 12 appointments.
- 4.10. Reasons for appointments have been varied, with advice and support provided around benefits including Child and Adult Disability Payments and Universal Credit as well as Further Education, Energy Advice and JizhfytstR frsyjsfshj%ff | fshj%JR F.3
- 4.11. A meeting has been organised for mid-November to review the service to date and make any changes necessary to processes and arrange better promotion in schools where there have been fewer appointments.

### **Digital Inclusion**

- 4.12. In December 2021, Leadership Board allocated £100,000 to support work around digital inclusion. £80,000 of this sum was allocated to OneRen to co-ordinate a Digital Champions programme,

with a further £20,000 allocated to support further research and evaluation in digital exclusion in partnership with SCVO and a community device refurbishment initiative. In addition to the funding support, the new Digital Delivery Manager, in post since July, has been working with the existing Digital partnerships in Renfrewshire to better understand the digital landscape in Renfrewshire and develop a person-centred approach to meet digital need.

4.13. One of these partnerships, Renfrewshire's Citizens Voice Forum, was established in 2021, and is led by Renfrewshire Council in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). The Forum seeks to mitigate digital exclusion through co-designing digital inclusion solutions with partners, which include:

- To recruit a Digital Champions Coordinator to recruit and train digital champions and thereafter build a network of digital champions;
- To develop and implement DigiZones; and
- To explore the creation of a device recycling / refurbishment organisation with the possibility of providing employment opportunities.

Citizens Voice members are also currently considering developing a hyper-local broadband social tariff campaign in order to raise awareness and uptake of Broadband Social Tariffs.

4.14. Using the £80,000 allocated, and with support from Citizens Voice, OneRen recruited a Digital Champion Coordinator in May 2023 for a two year period. To date, the Coordinator has trained five digital champions, who have in turn supported 60+ learners with over 50 hours spent supporting learners. Plans are being progressed to establish a Digital Champions Network in early 2024, whereby bringing Digital Champions together, enabling them to share, learn, support and collaborate with each other with the aim of benefitting learners / end users.

4.15. A sub-group of Citizens Voice has also been working to introduce the DigiZone initiative. DigiZones will be 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. Starting with OneRen libraries, it is intended that partner organisations will sign up to become a DigiZone, advertising which digital supports they can provide.

4.16. The DigiZone Sub-Group is working with the Council's Marketing and Communications Team to develop a brand identity for Digizones as well as develop onboarding materials for organisations along with a monitoring and evaluation framework.

4.17. With regard to the community device refurbishment initiative, a Device Recycling Sub-Group (of Citizens Voice Forum) has been set up and has undertaken a scoping exercise to understand device recycling and refurbishment organisations operating across Scotland. This work builds on work being progressed by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) at a national level who hosted an event in Stirling in September, bringing together such organisations.

4.18. The Sub-Group are currently working with an Ayrshire-based Device Recycling/Refurbishment Charity, who has expressed an interest in having a presence and supporting digital inclusion in

Renfrewshire. The Charity is currently being supported via Engage Renfrewshire and Council Services to seek appropriate premises to operate from and potential funding opportunities to apply to. The Council's Economic Development team are also working with the organisation to see where there's a fit with employability.

- 4.19. Renfrewshire's #DigiRen network also supports digital and data equity, whilst ensuring no-one is left behind. #DigiRen comprises 150 local and national organisations representing the Public, and third sectors including Social Housing and also has members representing the Academia Sector, sharing a common goal of closing the digital and data divide in Renfrewshire (and beyond). #DigiRen is a collaboration space for partners and organisations to share information and best practice on digital inclusion, learn from each other, support initiatives and each other and help grow both the Network and organisations. The group is jointly chaired by Engage Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire Council.

### **Winter Connections**

- 4.20. After the success of the Winter Connections programme in 2022/23, the new programme for winter 23/24 has launched, with the fund opening to applications at the end of September. The fund comprises £75,000 from the Fairer Renfrewshire budget with a further £10,000 from the Recovery Change Programme to reduce stigma and to make sure activities are accessible to people in recovery from mental health issues or alcohol and drug use.
- 4.21. Like last year, organisations are able to bid for up to £2000 to provide activities which are:
- Open, free and easy to access
  - Inclusive, welcoming, respectful, and safe
  - Able or willing to provide connections to other services and supports
  - Able to offer warm drinks/snacks/food along with activities, where possible
- 4.22. A Panel comprising Renfrewshire Council, Renfrewshire HSCP and Engage Renfrewshire has been set up to scrutinise applications and make recommendations to the Head of Policy and Partnerships, who has been delegated authority to make decisions on funding to support speedy distribution of funds.
- 4.23. To the end of October, 30 applications for funding have been made, with the panel looking at range and time of activities as well as geographical split before making recommendations to ensure coverage is as wide as possible across Renfrewshire.
- 4.24. Officers are also working with OneRen Libraries to extend provision of a range of activities across all Renfrewshire libraries as last year, and in addition allow libraries to offer hot drinks to all those attending the library.

## **5. Participation and engagement**

### **Lived experience panel**

- 5.1. The Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee has been given a number of updates relating to work of the Fairer Renfrewshire panel. Since the last Sub-Committee meeting, the Panel have met with officers from the Council around Net Zero, with their ideas around actions feeding into the Plan for Net Zero workshop which took place on 11 October. As outlined above, they also met with Advice Works to discuss barriers to seeking advice, and better promotion of advice services.
- 5.2. Some changes have taken place within membership of the Panel, with members leaving due to health issues, and one due to a conflict of interest as they became a member of the STAR Project Board. Two new members have been recruited, and recruitment will continue to bring the panel back up to full membership. The Panel will continue to meet, with Council communications and child poverty being amongst the topics planned for Panel input before Christmas.

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## 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:** Diane Dunn, Lead Officer Fairer Renfrewshire Programme