

To: Leadership Board

On: 23 February 2022

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Social Renewal Update

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council and partners have a key focus on tackling poverty and inequality and improving wellbeing. In March 2021, an initial Social Renewal Plan was approved by Council and this, combined with external funding sources and existing investment such as the Tackling Poverty Programme, continue to support Renfrewshire residents through the pandemic.
- 1.2 Officers are working with partners to progress all actions in the current Social Renewal Plan, with a specific focus on income, poverty and financial insecurity, given the current financial challenges facing residents over Winter 2021 as a result of significant increases in the cost of living. Recent progress is highlighted in section 4 of this report.
- 1.3 It was announced in late 2021 that £848,000 additional funding would be allocated to the Council from Scottish Government, to support people experiencing financial insecurity over the immediate winter period. Given the need to allocate this funding expediently, Leadership Board agreed to authorise the Chief Executive to develop and implement local funding arrangements in consultation with the Council Leader. It was agreed that an update would be provided to the next cycle of the Leadership Board on the utilisation of the funding, the detail of which is provided in Section 5 of this report. Additional funding will require to be administered by the Council, from

the £290m funding recently announced by Scottish Government to provide support to households impacted by the rising costs of living. Further detail is provided in Sections 5.8 and 5.9.

- 1.4 In addition to these newer streams of funding and related activity, work has continued in Renfrewshire to deliver the Tackling Poverty Programme. The allocation of funding required to support existing initiatives in 22/23 is outlined in Section 6 for approval. The current programme runs from 2018 to 2022, and work is underway to develop options for the next phase of this programme which forms a key element of our overall Social Renewal Plan.
- 1.5 To inform this next phase, partners will work together to revisit and refresh the COVID community impact assessment undertaken during 2020. This will specifically include repeating key elements of the Public Services Panel survey undertaken in late 2020 around the impact of the pandemic, with a focus on financial insecurity and low income.
- 1.6 A specific programme of work will also be undertaken through the 'Get Heard' initiative, engaging with a wide range of voices and experiences of poverty to inform our policies and plans. By holding discussions with people affected by poverty, we will find out what is working and not working in their communities and what needs to change to ensure support is available.
- 1.7 This additional analysis will also feed into the development of new Council and Community Plans during 2022, and also the updated Service Improvement Plans which will be brought to Board in summer 2022.
- 1.8 In terms of wider developments in relation to Social Renewal, and as previously reported to the Board, officers have linked with Engage Renfrewshire on the distribution of the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund of £509,000 allocated by Scottish Government to Engage Renfrewshire as the local Third Sector Interface. The fund is designed to address the mental health inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic and the needs of a range of 'at risk' groups locally. The fund closed for applications on 7 January and decisions as to allocation of funding to community groups and small local charities were completed and communicated to applicants in early February. The list of successful applicants can be found on the Engage Renfrewshire website.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that members:
 - Note the work that has been undertaken to progress the Social Renewal Plan in Renfrewshire.

- Note the allocation of £848,000 Scottish Government funding to support individuals and families in need in Renfrewshire through the routes outlined in section 5 of this report.
- Approve allocation of Tackling Poverty Programme budget for 2022/23 as detailed in Section 6 of this report.
- Note the plan to revisit the COVID Community Impact Assessment this year, including another Public Services Panel exercise to gather views of the Renfrewshire public on the effects of the continuing pandemic.

3. Background

3.1 Following the completion of a local COVID community impact assessment undertaken by the Council and partners, an initial Social Renewal Plan was approved by Council in March 2021. Within the plan a number of specific priorities were identified for further action and during Summer 2021, officers worked with partners to identify actions in relation to the income, financial insecurity and poverty theme as a key priority, in recognition of the end of the furlough scheme and rising food and energy costs being experienced, which were anticipated to worsen over Winter 2021.

3.2 Since then, the situation has become very challenging with regards to essential costs for households:

- The average energy bill in the UK will rise in April by around £700 annually after a 54% increase to the price cap. It is predicted there will be a further rise at the next review in October 2022.
- The cost of the weekly food shop rose at its fastest rate in a decade in January 2022, with the cost of goods predicted to keep rising throughout 2022 (an estimated rise of £180 for the annual grocery bill).
- And with inflation set to rise above 7% by spring 2022, there will be likely increases in other everyday essentials such transport, broadband and mobile contracts.

3.3 This paper provides a summary of existing and proposed actions to support low-income households to manage these challenges, specifically:

- An update on actions that were approved by the Leadership Board in September 2021 to support low-income households throughout the winter period, including in relation to food insecurity, fuel poverty and the anticipated employment challenges linked to the end of furlough.
- The allocation of £848,000 of additional funding from the Scottish Government to tackle financial insecurity during Winter 2021
- The proposed allocation of funding through the existing Tackling Poverty Programme to allow a range of projects and initiatives to continue during 2022/23 which support low-income households and seek to tackle inequality.

- 3.4 There are now a significant range of activities and supports in place across Renfrewshire which have and continue to be used to support people experiencing financial insecurity. Officers are continuing to work with partners to identify gaps in provision, and to ensure that where additional funding is identified, that it can be allocated most effectively to reach those who may not have been able to access other supports.

4. Update on Social Renewal Plan Actions – Financial Insecurity

- 4.1 In December 2021 an update on the Social Renewal Plan was provided to Leadership Board outlining progress on the use of funding allocated to support a number of projects designed to provide immediate assistance to communities and individuals who were affected by the pandemic, especially in relation to low income and financial insecurity. Since the last Board report work has been ongoing and progress to date includes:

- The **Fair Work Renfrewshire** service which was launched in October 2021 by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau, to provide employment advice to support clients. The service had supported 49 people to the end of December, more than half of whom had a disability;
- Building on the success of November's benefit take up campaign, a **money advice week** took place in January 2022 with Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau working with the Advice Works team to offer appointments all week. The 50 appointments available were all booked and a variety of advice given around money and debt.
- The **Affordable Credit Officer** commenced work at Engage Renfrewshire on 8th November and has engaged with 21 organisations, presented to 4 groups, including a Ren talk to Council staff and attracted additional funding to do some dedicated work with ethnic minority communities.
- The **Fuel insecurity Pilot** between Renfrewshire Foodbank, Linstone Housing Association and Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau has provided over 100 fuel vouchers to those in need of support with fuel costs, both through pre-payment and credit meters to the end of December. This financial support has been backed with energy advice. Work is ongoing to ensure appropriate referrals are made, for example through DWP and HSCP.

- 4.2 In addition, in September 2021, members of the Leadership Board approved guidance to support the establishment of the **Renfrewshire Community Food Fund**. £25,000 of funding was allocated to provide small awards to organisations to develop community food offerings which move from emergency response to promote dignified, localised, access to food and community resilience. The initial awards from this fund have now been made.

- 4.3 Work to support **community pantries** is continuing. STAR Project opened their pantry late last year, RAMH launched its pantry on 14th February and Active Communities plan to launch their pantry when the community hub opens in the coming months.

5. Scottish Government Flexible Funding to tackle Financial Insecurity for Winter 2021-22

- 5.1 In December 2021, Renfrewshire Council was allocated £848,000 by the Scottish Government to support wellbeing by preventing and responding to financial insecurity. The funding is designed to provide proactive assistance for those likely to experience hardship – including people accessing Universal Credit or those who may not be eligible for mainstream support. This is a one-off allocation of funding, and is intended to be utilised to provide “cash-first” approaches, as well as advice and wider support.
- 5.2 Given the requirement to allocate this funding at pace over the Winter period, Leadership Board authorised the Chief Executive to develop and implement local arrangements to allocate this funding expediently, in consultation with the Council Leader, with an update to be provided to the Leadership Board in February 2022.
- 5.3 As outlined in the section above, a range of activities have been prioritised through the Social Renewal Programme to support low-income households to manage challenges around the rising cost of living and fuel costs over the winter period. In developing options in relation to this additional Scottish Government funding, officers worked with partners and across services to map financial payments / support arrangements that have been allocated through local authorities during the pandemic, and to undertake an initial assessment of specific groups that could be targeted through this funding. This exercise highlighted:
- Experience from Advice Works indicates that there are a number of people in need in Renfrewshire who do not and have never engaged with services, including priority groups such as ethnic minority communities and those with a disability. Single men, especially young men, have been identified as a group that do not tend to come forward for support.
 - Partners are increasingly reporting that the single most worrying issue for low-income households at present is the rising cost of fuel, further exacerbated by concern around the increase in the price cap this April.
 - Housing services have also additionally identified that there will be number of tenants who are not in arrears, due to paying priority bills such as rent and Council Tax, but may well be struggling to meet other costs of living. There has been a Tenant Support Fund funded by Scottish Government and administered by local authorities to people renting in social or private sectors who are struggling with rent arrears directly caused by COVID-19 or at risk of repossession or homelessness.

- A one-off Low Income Pandemic Payment of £130 was made in Autumn 2021 to help towards increased costs and potential lost income during the pandemic. This was paid to people who are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction as well as some people who are exempt from Council Tax.
- There have been a number of Scottish Government funded payments throughout the pandemic focussed on low-income households with children. These will be sustained throughout 2022 as four payments throughout the year (known as Scottish Child Bridging Payment), when they will be replaced by the full-roll out of the Scottish Child Payment by Social Security Scotland. These payments are £130 per child eligible for free school meals due to low income, and will be made at Easter, Summer, October and Christmas in line with the start of the school holidays. These payments are for children 6 and over, as those under 6 will receive Scottish Child Payment.
- In addition, cash payments of £2.25 per day, per child are made for free school meals for the periods of times children have been on school holidays. The payment is made at a flat rate regardless of age.
- Social Security Scotland introduced the Scottish Child Payment for low-income households with children under 6 in February 2021. This is £10 per child per week, and will rise to £20 per week in April 2022. It is planned that this will be further rolled out to low-income households with children under 16 by the end of 2022.
- Locally, we continue to administer both the Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments throughout the pandemic. While these supports are 'business-as-usual', since the beginning of the pandemic they have been topped up by both local and national funding to meet demand.

5.4 Reducing child poverty is a key priority for all partners, and these payments are vital to families on low incomes. There are a number of priority groups affected by child poverty, where there are higher levels, and risk of, poverty in the household. These include households where someone is disabled, black and minority ethnic families, lone-parent families, parents under 25, families with a child under 1 and families with three or more children. More than 8 out of 10 children in relative poverty in Scotland are at in at least one of these priority groups, and so effectively targeting these groups is an important part of any intervention around financial insecurity. However, it should be noted that other client groups, in particular older adults and those without children, may not been able to access a number of available funds which were primarily targeted at households with children.

5.5 In response to the local needs assessment undertaken and in line with the Scottish Government's guidance on the utilisation of this funding, the £848,000 of additional Scottish Government has been initially allocated as follows:

- £230,000 to provide individual grants of £100 for people facing financial insecurity/hardship

- £325,000 to provide a £50 payment per child for winter clothing for children in receipt of School Clothing Grant.
- £160,000 to top up the Scottish Welfare Fund to maintain payments at the current rate.
- £90,000 to top up Discretionary Housing Payments which will assist clients in maintaining their tenancy and prevent homelessness.
- £38,000 for an additional Improving the Cancer Journey Coordinator for one year to support individuals who have had a cancer diagnosis, with demand on the service increasing significantly during 2021.
- There may be some movement between funding streams in line with demand, to ensure the Scottish Government funding is fully allocated.

5.6 This work has been progressed at pace to make sure that these funds are available to households when they need them. The additional winter clothing payments were made from 2 February and the grants for people facing financial insecurity commenced from 15 February 2022. Top up funding for the Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments has been made available with immediate effect, although the purpose of the top-ups is to allow the continued disbursement of these funds throughout the year.

5.7 Full detail is provided at Appendix 1.

5.8 During the Stage 3 debate in the Scottish Parliament on 10 February 2022, Finance Secretary Kate Forbes announced a further £290 million in financial support to help address the rising cost of living. New measures announced include:

- £280 million to provide £150 to every household in receipt of Council Tax Reduction in any Band and to provide £150 to all other occupied households in Bands A to D.
- £10 million in 2022-23 to continue the Fuel Insecurity Fund to help households from rationing their energy use

5.9 Guidance on the allocation of this funding is currently being developed by Scottish Government in partnership with COSLA, and thereafter funding in Renfrewshire will be allocated and administered in line with this national guidance.

6. Tackling Poverty Programme update

6.1 The initiatives outlined in sections 4 and 5 above are additional to the core Tackling Poverty Programme, which has been supported over a 5 year period through £5m allocated by the Council in March 2018. The programme continues to deliver positive outcomes for local people and families – support which was been invaluable during the pandemic. It is proposed that project

budgets are sustained at their current levels in the final year of the current programme, with a spend of £1,157,300 broken down as follows:

Targeting support to families that need it most – £0.7 million

6.2 It is proposed that funding is allocated to support the delivery of the following initiatives:

- The Families First approach continues to offer early years and family support services, including targeted financial advice and parenting support.
- The Healthier, Wealthier Children service will continue to provide targeted advice and support to new and expectant parents managing changes to finances and supporting them to claim benefits they are entitled to. Between September and December 2021, the service has had 139 referrals, 44 of which were new cases and this resulted in financial gain of £159,141. The total financial gain this year to December now stands £365,225.
- Energy Advice will also continue to be offered to people who need support to reduce their energy bills, manage fuel debt and improve the energy efficiency in their homes. Energy advisers engaged with over 300 clients between October and December, through virtual visits or by email. Clients continue to have concerns over energy price increases.

Removing barriers to participation for children and young people- £0.46 million

6.3 It is proposed that funding is allocated to support the delivery of the following initiatives:

- Breakfast clubs will continue, providing a healthy breakfast to all pupils universally. This project relieves financial pressure on low income families, but most importantly, makes sure that children start the school day ready to learn. In total, 32,711 breakfasts have now been served across all schools since clubs resumed in May 2021.
- The Cost of the School Day fund will continue to operate across all primary and secondary schools in Renfrewshire, directly supporting families in a variety of ways including uniforms, food, transport, extra-curricular activities and curricular expenses. Majority of spending is around clothing – uniform and warm clothing such as winter jackets. A Participatory Budgeting pilot is currently being carried out with 9 schools using Attainment Challenge funding.
- The programme will continue to provide Street Stuff activities during the holidays and at weekends, along with the provision of free healthy meals. Street Stuff festive clubs took place between 20th December and 6th January and were delivered by taking the activities/buses out into communities). This approach proved successful and the team could see real benefit of delivering activities into community areas where there was a need. Total recorded attendance figures were 258 with 225 meals purchased.

- The peer health project will continue in partnership with Active Communities, working with young people in secondary schools across Renfrewshire to identify key health priorities in their school and developing young people to lead their own activities to improve health and wellbeing, with a focus on mental health. From Aug – December 2021, 229 Hearty Lives Peer Educators have been recruited and trained in Renfrewshire and have work with 2110 of their peers to support their mental health.
- Scoobmobile will continue to provide a mobile public library service directly to children and families in communities. The programme continues to support the delivery of the Scoobmobile which introduces children to the benefit of reading and play and supports the Council's ambitions to narrow the literacy attainment gap. Due to COVID restrictions, there has been more focussed work within schools and early years settings.

6.4 Work is now underway through the Social Renewal Programme to develop the next phase of the local response to poverty and inequality. Specific work will be progressed with the Poverty Alliance to develop a deeper understanding of the issues impacting low income households, and to listen, learn and respond to lived experiences.

7. Next steps for social renewal

Community impact assessment

7.1 Work is underway to refresh the Community Impact Assessment that informed the Social Renewal Plan in 2020. To support our current understanding of the impact of the continuing pandemic on local people and communities, we will revisit the Public Services Panel survey in early 2022 to again gather views of the Renfrewshire public on the effects of the continuing pandemic.

7.2 A repeated Public Services Panel survey will allow us to compare the views and experiences of Renfrewshire residents with the baseline from last year's exercise, as well as some comparison with Scotland wide data. It also gives the opportunity to understand particular challenges in further detail, such as financial wellbeing.

Get Heard Programme

7.3 As part of our ongoing work to understand the needs of people living with low incomes in Renfrewshire, we will continue our 'Get Heard' work, engaging with a wide range of voices and experiences of poverty to inform our policies and plans. By holding discussions with people affected by poverty, we will find out what is working and not working in their communities and what needs to change to better support them.

- 7.4 The work undertaken alongside Poverty Alliance as part of their 'Get Heard' work has now been published in two reports; "Living through a pandemic: Experiences of low-income families in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde" and "In the room where it happens: Approached to engaging with people with direct experience of poverty in the development of local child poverty policy." In addition to the general recommendations from this research, working closely with Northern Star Associates and Poverty Alliance means that the Renfrewshire case study details a number of specific considerations and recommendations for progressing this work locally.

Participatory Scotland

- 7.5 Work has continued with Corra Foundation and Participatory City Foundation to explore the feasibility of a Participatory Scotland pilot in Renfrewshire. Corra Foundation have done initial work with local voluntary and community organisations to explore what this approach might look like in Renfrewshire. It is anticipated that the feasibility work will continue throughout the first half of 2022, which will include some 'pop-up' demonstration work and more detailed work with Council and partners to explore what this might look like in Renfrewshire.

Refresh of Community and Council Plans

- 7.6 The process to refresh the Council Plan and Community Plan (Renfrewshire's Local Outcome Improvement Plan) will be developed during 2022. Service Improvement Plans will be developed which reflect the initial work of the Social Renewal Plan to date, with these being submitted to policy boards in May/ June 2022.

External funding

- 7.7 Finally, as previously reported to the Board, officers have linked with Engage Renfrewshire to distribute the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund of £509,000 allocated by Scottish Government to Engage Renfrewshire as the local Third Sector Interface. The fund is designed to address the mental health inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic and the needs of a range of 'at risk' groups locally. The fund closed for applications on 7 January and decisions as to allocation of funding to community groups and small local charities were completed and communicated to applicants in early February. The list of successful applicants can be found on the Engage Renfrewshire website.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the pandemic has had and will continue to have a significant impact on the resources available to the Council. Given the anticipated longer term financial challenges facing the Council, the requirement for targeting of resources in priority areas will be essential.

The paper details proposals to allocate funding to support key priorities identified within the social renewal plan.

2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None
 3. **Community/Council Planning** – There has been a strong partnership response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Renfrewshire with community and third sector organisations working closely together to maximise the resources available at a local level to meet the needs of local people and communities. This will be a critical focus going forward as partners work collectively to mitigate the impact on those most negatively impacted in our communities.
 4. **Legal** - none
 5. **Property/Assets** - none
 6. **Information Technology** – none
 7. **Equality and Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
 8. **Health and Safety** – none
 9. **Procurement** – none
 10. **Risk** – none
 11. **Privacy Impact** – none
 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none
 13. **Climate Risk** – none
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List of Background Papers

Author: Laura McIntyre, Head of Policy and Commissioning.

Appendix 1 – Allocation of Flexible Funding to support Winter Financial Insecurity Funding

	Description
Grant for people facing financial insecurity	<p>In line with identified areas of need, a grant at a flat rate of £100 to be issued to those needing support to cover fuel and essentials. This will be for those who are having to choose between heating their homes and buying other essential items and be targeted at priority groups. Recipients would be identified through a number of routes, including those already known to Advice Works as being in need, and through other Council services, such as Energy Management Unit. Receiving referrals from trusted partners working with priority groups such as ethnic minority communities would allow grants to be targeted. Where referrals are accepted, this would allow Advice Works to provide income maximisation advice.</p> <p>Oversight by Advice Works would prevent duplication of applications, while also ensuring that clients met a simple criteria, to identify whether individuals would qualify. These questions allow both for those whose income is made up entirely of benefits and those who work but have low income, a group normally not as readily reached, but who may be struggling.</p> <p>Payment would be made via existing mechanisms, direct to bank account as primary and Paypoint voucher as secondary methods as per existing FSM/SWF payments.</p>
Further School Clothing Grant for winter clothing	<p>When families get their School Clothing Grant this is typically during summer and in many cases clothing bought is suitable for that season and doesn't include winter clothing. Payment of £50 per child to those in receipt of school clothing grants would allow purchase of winter clothing for children.</p> <p>Payment would be made through current payment methods to families in receipt of School Clothing Grant.</p>
Scottish Welfare Fund Top Up	<p>Scottish Welfare Fund payments are prioritised due to funding constraints, and based on need and consequences were a grant not to be made. Currently, awards are being made at the level which allows payment at the most generous level. Topping up the amount</p>

	<p>allocated to the Welfare Fund by Scottish Government with an additional £160,000 would allow Welfare Fund payments to applicants to be maintained at the current level until the end of the financial year with no reduction to number or amount of awards.</p>
Discretionary Housing Payment	<p>Discretionary Housing Payments are funded by allocated amounts from the Department for Work and Pensions and assist those who have a shortfall in their rent due to welfare reforms, including the 'bedroom tax'. The payments assist clients in maintaining their tenancy and prevent homelessness as well as helping alleviate poverty. The council decides the appropriate payment amount based on the customer's financial situation and taking into consideration its own budgetary constraints.</p> <p>Topping up the budget for DHPs by £90,000 would allow the current levels of payment to be maintained and support tenants sustain their tenancy, negating some of the effects of the Universal Credit uplift removal.</p>
Additional ICJ Coordinator	<p>Operating in Renfrewshire since January 2020, Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) Coordinators offer support to Renfrewshire residents who have received a cancer diagnosis. Working with Advice Works partners, the service has generated almost £600,000 for ICJ service users, as well as supporting with a wide variety of other issues, such as employment and housing issues. Numbers of clients using ICJ have been increasing in the two years since the project was set up.</p> <p>Recently, due to Covid and delayed diagnosis/treatment, the clients presenting are more likely to have more complex needs and need more, varied support which adds an additional burden for Coordinators. Funding of £38,000 for an additional Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) Coordinator to be sited within the existing ICJ team will allow clients to be seen in a shorter timescale and individual needs identified sooner.</p>