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**To: Leadership Board**

**On: 14 June 2023**

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**Report by: Chief Executive**

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**Heading: Fairer Renfrewshire Update**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Council and its partners continue to work together to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire Programme, with a strong shared focus currently on the local response to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 This paper provides a summary of the key headline issues relating to the cost-of-living crisis locally, as reported to the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.
- 1.3 Specific updates are provided in relation to:
- The development of new enhanced schools advice and family advice models
  - The evaluation of the Winter Connections Programme
  - The development of the Fair Food Renfrewshire partnership and proposed further tranche of the Community Food Fund
  - Proposals for the delivery of holiday activities during summer 2023 which will provide support to low income families and;
  - An update on the work of Renfrewshire's lived experience panel.
- 1.4 Officers continue to work with partners to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. Priority actions over the next quarter include:
- Development of the poverty and participation test of change, working alongside the newly established lived experience panel to develop recommendations and the shape of future work
  - Developing and delivering budget investments including holiday activities and winter school clothing grant
  - Producing Renfrewshire's Local Child Poverty Action Report

- Commencing a 'deep dive' data exercise around child poverty as a Community Planning Partnership, focussing on the six priority family groups
  - Establishing the Fair Food Renfrewshire partnership, using the Sustainable Food Places toolkit
  - Continuing the evaluation of projects within Tackling Poverty Programme and exploring future options with services around required priorities going forward
  - Delivery of the remaining Winter Connections programme, and associated evaluation of the programme.
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## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1 It is recommended that elected members:**

- Note the content of the report and the work being undertaken to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme;
  - Agree that work to co-ordinate and deliver a Winter Connections 2023 is progressed and that £75,000 of Fairer Renfrewshire Funding is allocated to support the delivery of the programme;
  - Note the proposed summer holiday programme outlined in Section 6, with £25,000 of existing funding being allocated to pilot a small grants fund to extend the programme of activities and support available across communities in Summer 2023.
  - Agree that authority is delegated to the Head of Policy and Partnerships to award grants in line with the guidance which will be developed for both the Winter Connections and Summer Holiday Provision. An update on both schemes will be provided to Leadership Board in September 2023.
  - Agree the allocation of £10,000 funding to top up the Community Food Fund, with a further application round for the fund to open following summer 2023.
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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 As elected members will be aware through previous updates to the Leadership Board, the Council is in the process of developing and delivering a new Fairer Renfrewshire Programme. This brings together all previous programmes that have been developed to tackle the inequalities that exist across Renfrewshire's communities, including those relating to poverty, alcohol and drugs and COVID recovery, with an immediate focus on the local response to the deepening cost-of-living crisis.
- 3.2 The Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee continues to meet to provide oversight of all related activities being undertaken, with the latest meeting being held on 31 May 2023. A Fairer Renfrewshire Officer Group has also been established which currently meets monthly and is chaired by the Head of Policy and Partnerships.
- 3.3 At its meeting on 31st May 2023, the sub-committee considered:

- The most recent programme update including information on recent statistics and research in relation to the cost of living crisis.
- The evaluation of the Winter Connections programme.
- Proposals in relation to summer holiday activities to support low income families in Renfrewshire.
- An update on the child poverty deep dive exercise.

3.4 In terms of key statistics highlighted at the meeting of the sub-committee it is worth noting:

- Following a jump in the inflation rate in March, the inflation rate has now resumed its downward trajectory to 8.7% in April 2023. Food inflation, however, has continued to rise and is now at 19.1%.
- In response to continued inflationary pressures, the Bank of England has increased the interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point twice since the last Sub-Committee, and the base rate is now 4.5%.
- Recent projections anticipate a stabilisation in the energy market over the coming months, with the price cap set to fall below the rate of the Energy Price Guarantee which is due to end at the end of June.

#### **4. Programme Updates**

4.1 Since the last update to Leadership Board in April 2023, a range of activities have continued to be progressed by officers and partners. A summary is provided in the sections below.

##### **Advice services**

4.2 Further to previous updates, the new Schools Advice Service will commence in Summer 2023. This service will be provided by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau across all secondary schools in Renfrewshire including Additional Support Needs settings. This service will be promoted throughout June, with officers working to establish relationships across schools at the end of term.

4.3 Initially, advice workers will be embedded within school settings on a rota basis, but this will be kept under review and a flexible approach will be taken to make sure that the service is well-used. Clients will also be able to book appointments online, where they will have the choice to meet in the school location or elsewhere. Referrals can be received by pupils over 16, the parent/carer of any pupils, school staff on behalf of families or schools staff themselves.

4.4 Complementary to this, work is underway to launch the family advice service within Advice Works. In April 2023, Leadership Board approved the allocation of £140,000 from the Fairer Renfrewshire funding to pilot a new approach to family advice services for one year. The newly formed team will work with families to maximise household income through income advice, but also seeks to increase take-up of wider supports provided by the Council for families, for example, free school meals, school clothing grants or employability supports for parents. A key initial focus for the team will be Free School Meal uptake, as well as reaching out to support families with School Meal Debt.

## **School meal debt**

- 4.5 In February 2023, COSLA published Good Practice Principles for School Meal Debt Management with partners from across local government professional and representative organisations. These were developed to promote recognised positive practice in terms of the management of school meal debt, recognising the impact of the cost of living crisis and the shared focus on tackling child poverty in Scotland.
- 4.6 Work has commenced in Renfrewshire to review current processes and policy in relation to the management of school meal debt. In line with the COSLA principles and the focus of our local Fairer Renfrewshire programme, proposals are being developed for consideration by elected members which would seek to remove the issue of school meal debt for vulnerable families living in Renfrewshire. This will include actions to improve the efficiency of systems used and most importantly ensure that support is provided within the school environment to families who may be experiencing issues, at the earliest opportunity and in as non-stigmatising and supportive a way as possible.
- 4.7 A key element of the COSLA principles being considered in the local review, is the opportunity to write off current debt accrued by our most vulnerable families, with a particular focus on those families as being at most risk of poverty. A specific proposal will be brought forward for approval as close as possible to the start of the new academic term in order to address this issue at start of the school year, with ongoing outreach and preventative work also to be progressed through the schools advice models which will be piloted.

## **Fair Food Renfrewshire**

- 4.8 Following on from an engagement session that was held in October 2022, a second Fair Food Renfrewshire event was held in Johnstone Town Hall on 11th May 2023. Working closely with Nourish Scotland, and using the Sustainable Food Places Toolkit, the purpose of this event was to further engage with a wider stakeholder group and shape the vision and priorities of the food partnership.
- 4.9 Over 40 people attended the event, including Council officers, HSCP officers, NHS officers, businesses, growing groups, community groups, and Third Sector groups. The meeting was open to any organisation who has a passionate interest in food whether it be growing, producing, distributing, selling, or providing, with an emphasis on nutrition, sustainability, and community benefits.
- 4.10 The output from the event will be collated and will provide the background for a Fair Food Steering Group to set a vision and priorities for the partnership moving forward. High level themes emerging from the workshop included:
- Ending food insecurity and the need for foodbanks
  - Increased access and availability of growing grounds in every town and village within Renfrewshire
  - Increase in education regarding nutrition and cooking skills, and wider use of “home economics” type classes within educational, health, and community settings
  - Encourage individuals to buy local food, and also encourage organisations to place emphasis better value of using local food suppliers within a procurement policy context.

- 4.11 At full Council on 4 May 2023, elected members agreed and considered a motion which noted *“that foodbanks and Food Pantries are facing high levels of demand from adults and children in need of vital help at this time. Council agrees to promote the work of local charities like Foodbanks and Pantries in internal communications, to raise awareness and highlight collection points. Council also agrees to work with Foodbanks and Pantries to look at levels of demand and assess whether funding support could be provided by the Council”*.
- 4.12 Work is being progressed to ensure information is shared and disseminated by the Council and its partners on the support that is available for people experiencing food insecurity. £50,000 was initially allocated in 2022 to provide grant funding to local organisations that provide this type of support across Renfrewshire through the Community Food Fund. Through active management of the grant funding allocated, £15,000 of this funding remains available for allocation in a further round of the Community Food Fund. It is proposed that additional funding of £10,000 is also allocated from Fairer Renfrewshire funding to bring the total funding available to £25,000, with applications to the Fund reopening following the summer recess.

### **Lived Experience Panel**

- 4.13 Further to updates provided at both Leadership Board and the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee, progress continues to develop lived experience models locally, particularly the development of a panel of people with lived experience of poverty to inform the Council's policy and practice.
- 4.14 A diverse panel of 15 people has been recruited. The Panel have met formally six times, as well as meeting in-between panel meetings to debrief and develop the work alongside a community artist to create a record of their experience.
- 4.15 The Panel are currently planning an outcomes sharing event alongside Star Project to showcase their work over the period which was held on Tuesday 13th June 2023, with the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee and other key stakeholders invited along to hear about the panel's 'journey of collaboration as they work towards a Fairer Renfrewshire for all.'
- 4.16 An evaluation of the process has also been carried out by Poverty Alliance to explore how these types of participation processes can inform work going forward, and to inform the development of the model moving forward. Officers are currently undertaking contract arrangements to extend the existing panel arrangements for a further year.

## **5. Winter Connections**

- 5.1 At Leadership Board on 14 September 2022, elected members agreed that officers should develop a Winter Connections Programme which would provide a network of local places and spaces where people can connect to others in their community this winter.
- 5.2 In some local authority areas, plans were developed to open 'warm banks' – places where people can come to sit and keep warm during the winter period if they are having difficulty heating their homes. In Renfrewshire, the approach was focussed more on working alongside the local third sector to create opportunities for people to connect to each other and their communities over a range of activities. Winter Connections activities were

designed to be always free, open to all, in every neighbourhood and guarantee a warm welcome.

- 5.3 £50,000 of grant funding was allocated by the Leadership Board in September 2022, to support local groups and organisations to participate in the programme and to contribute some of the costs of delivery where this was required. In response to the level of interest from community organisations, a further £20,000 was allocated to the Winter Connections programme with a further £10,000 allocated to OneRen to deliver a programme of Winter Connections activities across the library network.
- 5.4 From the data that was collected by local groups and organisations, it is estimated that over 1800 people benefited from the Winter Connections programme.

*I met new people and have been in the company of people I wouldn't normally be in. I don't eat much anyways but being able to sit and chat with everyone as a community has benefited my health.*

Attendee at the Tannahill Centre

*Many adults who attend our groups were not eating breakfast or lunch before attending. The programme ensured they did have hot food while they were with us, this encouraged some of the families to come along at times when they might otherwise have not ventured out in the winter.*

Home-Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde

*62% of individuals who accessed the Drop-In for the first-time during Winter Connections, have continued engaging with STAR across a number of different activities from Gardening Clubs to well-being workshops.*

The Star Project

- 5.5 As part of the One Ren programme, most libraries offered two timetabled sessions each week of board games sessions and community jigsaws, however in some libraries these were available on a drop-in basis. The games were particularly popular with children and families. It is estimated that almost 2,000 people engaged with the timetabled sessions for games, jigsaws, and crafts over the 12 weeks.
- 5.6 Five of the libraries gave out craft kit bags for self-led craft sessions that people could do individually, with staff, with friends and family, or take home to use later. Foxbar Library offered an 11-week series of creative workshops led by an experienced artist and workshop facilitator. Regular attendees have been offered the opportunity to continue to meet in the library to work on creative projects together. All of those who participated expressed enhanced feelings of wellbeing from the enjoyment of the activities, the warm and welcoming library environment, and the provision of hot drinks.
- 5.7 Dedicated advice service drop ins were trialled in different library locations throughout the programme, however these were not well attended. However, providing this advice alongside the community market at for example the Tannahill Centre was more successful.

- 5.8 An evaluation has now been carried out on the programme, which was considered by the Fairer Renfrewshire sub committee on 31 May 2023. Key messages from the evaluation were highlighted as follows:
- Providing a specific activity at no cost and alongside provision of hot drinks or food has been key to the success of the Winter Connections programme. It was important for host organisations to have flexibility to adjust activities to ensure that they were as inclusive as possible.
  - The social aspect of bringing people together created a sense of community, which was especially important for people who were feeling isolated. Activities provided opportunities to learn new skills, make new friends and be creative.
  - Winter Connections highlighted the need for a programme of free activities and food for individuals and families that are experiencing financial hardship. The programme contributed to tackling food poverty in a discrete and dignified manner.
  - Benefits of the programme included connecting people with each other, encouraging new people to engage with services and creating a sense of belonging to the local community. It also helped to reduce social isolation and reduce financial costs for individuals and families.
  - The programme enabled some organisations to attract new volunteers and raise awareness of services throughout the local community.
  - The success of the libraries' programme demonstrates that these community assets are well placed to deliver free activities for all ages and to link visitors with other services and sources of information and advice.
- 5.9 A number of suggestions to strengthen and enhance the model were put forward, should a Winter Connections programme be offered in the future in Renfrewshire.
- 5.10 At the sub-committee meeting on 31 May, members discussed the key findings from the Winter Connections evaluation report and noted support for the continuation of the Winter programme in 2023. It is therefore recommended that work to co-ordinate and deliver a Winter Connections 2023 programme is progressed by the Head of Policy and Partnerships, and that £75,000 Fairer Renfrewshire Funding is allocated to support the programme.
- 5.11 In line with the feedback received from participating organisations, it would be preferable for preparations for the programme to commence immediately following the summer recess, including the launch of any grant applications process. It is therefore recommended that authority is delegated to the Head of Policy and Partnerships to award grants in line with the existing guidance which will be updated to reflect feedback received. An update on the process will be provided to Leadership Board in September 2023.

## **6 Holiday activities programme**

- 6.1 The Fairer Renfrewshire sub-committee recently considered a report which provided an overview of the current provision of school holiday activities and food support in Renfrewshire, and noted the work being undertaken by officers to review provision and to identify gaps and barriers to access, particularly for low-income families.
- 6.2 Initial work has been undertaken to review provision, including engagement with the Fairer Renfrewshire Lived Experience Panel. This has shaped proposals for the Summer 2023 programme, and highlighted the following considerations:
- Increasing awareness of existing provision, and how the current offer is communicated and promoted
  - Coverage of provision for different age ranges, with possible gaps identified for preschool children and also older teenagers
  - Some activities have additional cost barriers, for example transport and food
  - Discussion around targeting and eligibility, making sure those that need it the most can access, but recognising the potential barriers and stigma of eligibility criteria
  - Need to achieve fairness and consistency across different areas, balanced with local approaches suitable for different communities
  - Importance of working with young people to identify the activities that they want to participate in
- 6.3 As discussed at the recent meeting of the Fairer Renfrewshire sub-committee, £100,000 has been allocated as part of the Council's budget from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, to ensure low-income families are able to access holiday provision and healthy food, with national funding from Scottish Government now coming to an end. Moving forward it will therefore be increasingly important for partners to work together to maximise all of the resources and opportunities that are available in terms of holiday provision, and to ensure support is targeted to families that need this most over the summer holiday period.
- 6.4 From the work undertaken to date, it is clear that there is a great deal of summer holiday activity provision across Renfrewshire across all sectors in Renfrewshire – with a wide range of opportunities on a paid or free basis. It is important that all of the opportunities available are widely communicated to local families, children and young people, and that the role of all partners in providing these activities and in tackling child poverty is recognised.
- 6.5 It is therefore proposed that the summer 2023 programme operates based on the following key principles:
- There are a range of activities for children and families that are available in Renfrewshire – a mixture of child only, family activities, free/chargeable and across a number of different communities in Renfrewshire
  - The Council will work with partners to promote the variety of activities that are available across Renfrewshire across all sectors – making sure that families know what is on and where.



- The core focus of the £100,000 funding from Fairer Renfrewshire will be to provide activities which support families from the child poverty priority groups and to target gaps in provision across localities.
- Any activities funded through Fairer Renfrewshire should be free at the point of access. Full day activities should include the provision of a meal, and refreshments should be available at shorter activities.
- Core sports and activity camps will be delivered by the Community Learning and Development Team on 2 days per week (over 5 weeks) in each of the 6 locations in Renfrewshire, with specific focus on offering access to families in the six child poverty priority groups. This includes additional provision in Gallowhill given recent work in relation to assessing levels of child poverty in the area.
- A family activity programme will be delivered by the Community Learning and Development Team. This will operate in partnership with schools and early learning centres to offer access to families in the six child poverty priority groups.
- Opportunities will be progressed with One Ren, Future Paisley to provide free family-based activities which address gaps in geographical access and allow families to enjoy cultural and fun experiences that may not otherwise have access to in the summer holiday period.
- A grants fund will be piloted on a small-scale basis which will commence in June 2023 and will operate on a similar basis as the grant programme developed as part of the Winter Connections programme. Community groups and organisations will be invited to help partners address gaps in particular localities or for different priority groups. It is proposed that £25,000 of the £100,000 funding available is allocated for distribution through the grants fund.
- Evening activities will continue to be provided over the summer holiday period through the Street stuff activity programme – this will include multi-sports and gaming activities on the Street Stuff Buses with the provision of a healthy meal.
- Community Learning and Development Youth Services will continue to deliver activities across Renfrewshire

6.6 The approach to summer 2023 will allow us to try new approaches in line with the feedback from the lived experience panel in relation to removing barriers and prioritising access for low income families, as well as offering high quality family activities which offer opportunities to have fun together within the local community.

6.7 At Leadership Board in March 2023, delegated authority was granted to the Head of Policy and Partnerships to develop and implement the summer programme in consultation with the Council Leader. As outlined above in section 6.5, it is proposed that £25,000 of the £100,000 funding available, is allocated to support a small grants fund pilot to operate for Summer 2023. In order to ensure that this funding is able to be distributed as quickly as possible, it is recommended that authority is delegated to the Head of Policy and Partnerships to award grants in line with guidance which will be developed. Information on awards will be provided to the next Leadership Board in September 2023.

## 7. Next steps

### 7.1 Priorities for the Fairer Renfrewshire programme over the coming quarter include:

- Development of the poverty and participation test of change, working alongside the newly established lived experience panel to develop recommendations and the shape of future work
- Developing and delivering budget investments including holiday activities and winter school clothing grant
- Producing Renfrewshire's Local Child Poverty Action Report
- Commencing a 'deep dive' data exercise around child poverty as a Community Planning Partnership, focussing on the six priority family groups
- Establishing the Fair Food Renfrewshire partnership, using the Sustainable Food Places toolkit
- Continuing the evaluation of projects within Tackling Poverty Programme and exploring future options with services around required priorities going forward
- Delivery of the remaining Winter Connections programme, and associated evaluation of the programme.

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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the paper outlines recommendations for the allocation of £75,000 of Fairer Renfrewshire funding to support the delivery of Winter Connections 2023, with a further £10,000 from the fund recommended for allocation to top up the existing Community Food Fund.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – This report provides a summary of current partnership activities being progressed through the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, with a key focus on tackling the inequalities that exist in Renfrewshire.
4. **Legal** - none
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality and Human Rights** – The report provides an overview of the position around household income and expenditure, and is for noting. As such there are no impacts arising from the recommendation of this paper. It is however important to note that impacts on households explored within this paper are likely to be disproportionately felt by equality groups.
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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**Author:** Laura McIntyre, Head of Policy and Commissioning