

## Notice of Meeting and Agenda Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-committee

Date	Time	Venue
Wednesday, 31 January 2024	10:00	Council Chambers (Renfrewshire), Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

MARK CONAGHAN  
Head of Corporate Governance

### Membership

Councillor Jacqueline Cameron (Convener): Councillor Graeme Clark (Depute Convener):

Councillor Anne Hannigan: Councillor Alec Leishman: Councillor Marie McGurk: Councillor Iain Nicolson: Councillor Andy Steel:

### Hybrid Meeting

Please note that this meeting is scheduled to be held in the Council Chambers. However, it is a hybrid meeting and arrangements have been made for members to join the meeting remotely should they wish.

### Members of the Press and Public

Members of the press and public wishing to attend the meeting should report to the customer service centre where they will be met and directed to the meeting.

### Further Information

This is a meeting which is open to members of the public.

A copy of the agenda and reports for this meeting will be available for inspection prior to the meeting at the Customer Service Centre, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley and online at <http://renfrewshire.cmis.uk.com/renfrewshire/CouncilandBoards.aspx>

For further information, please email [democratic-services@renfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:democratic-services@renfrewshire.gov.uk)

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<https://renfrewshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

## Items of business

### Apologies

Apologies from members.

### Declarations of Interest and Transparency Statements

Members are asked to declare an interest or make a transparency statement in any item(s) on the agenda and to provide a brief explanation of the nature of the interest or the transparency statement.

- |          |   |                |
|----------|---|----------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Cost-of-Living Update</b>                | <b>5 - 16</b>  |
|          | Report by Chief Executive.                  |                |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Update</b> | <b>17 - 26</b> |
|          | Report by Chief Executive.                  |                |
| <b>3</b> | <b>School Meal Debt</b>                     |                |
|          | Presentation.                               |                |





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**To:** Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

**On:** 31 January 2024

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**Report by:** Chief Executive

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**Heading:** Cost-of-living Update

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 At each of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee meetings, an overview of key context and evidence around current pressures on household finances, both in terms of household income and expenditure has been provided to members.
- 1.2 Since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee on 15 November 2023, there have been a number of changes in economic factors including an increase in the Energy Price Cap from 1 January 2024, meaning households will pay more for their energy use. Inflation and interest rates remain high. Elected members are asked to note that:
- The rate of inflation is now 4% (Dec 23), rising unexpectedly from November's 3.9% rate and is still above the 2% target set by the Bank of England.
  - The inflation rate for food has fallen again; now 8%. This is the lowest rate since May 2022.
  - The Bank of England has kept the interest rate unchanged at 5.25% as of 13 December 2023, which is the highest rate in 15 years. The next review will be on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024.
  - The Energy Price Cap, originally introduced by Ofgem in January 2019 to set limits on the underlying rates energy suppliers, is now set at £1,928 from the 1 January until 31 March 2024. This means households who use gas and electricity and pay by direct debit will pay on average, £1,928, which is an increase from £1,834 the previous quarter.
- 1.3 This paper provides an overview of information collated by officers at both a national and local level where available.

## 2. Recommendations

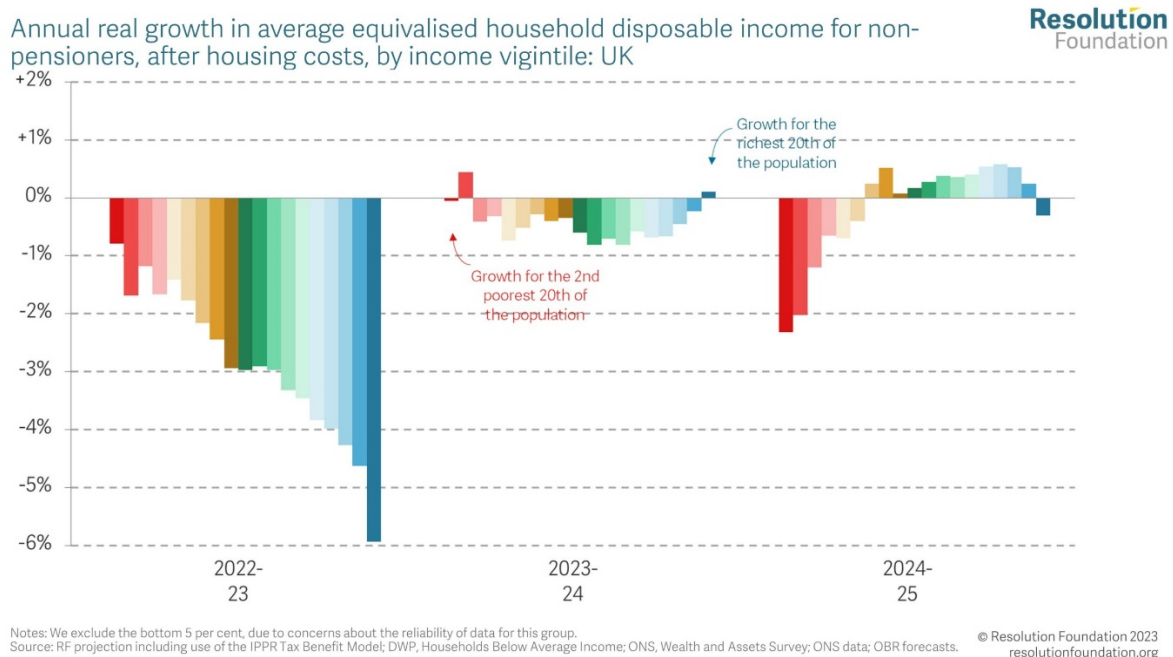
2.1 It is recommended that members of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee note the content of the report.

## 3. Background

3.1 At the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee meeting on 15 November 2023 an overview of key context and evidence around current pressures on household finances, both in terms of household income and expenditure was examined.

3.2 Although there have been some reductions in financial pressures, such as the recent fall in inflation and improvements in real wage growth, stubbornly high food and energy costs are continuing to significantly affect living standards with those on lower incomes disproportionately affected.

3.3 The Resolution Foundation is projecting zero real growth for the median non-pensioner household income over the next 3 years. For low-income households, it is projected that an extra 300,000 people will face absolute poverty next year across the UK, an overall rise of 3%. This analysis also shows that proportion of children living in absolute poverty is projected to rise the highest.



3.4 It is anticipated that housing costs will represent one of the most significant pressures on the cost-of-living in 2024. As 1.5 million mortgagors see increases to their mortgage bills of an average of £1,800 it will be mortgagors who will feel the biggest hits, but there will be significant associated impacts for many renters too.

## 4 Impacts of cost-of-living crisis

### Living costs

- 4.1 The latest insights into the cost of living from the Office of National Statistics in December found:
- Around 3 in 10 (28%) adults reported being worried (very or somewhat) about being able to afford the things they planned to do this Christmas period
  - the most reported actions were spending less on Christmas food or presents (46%), buying Christmas food or presents earlier to spread the cost (39%), and using personal savings to buy Christmas food or presents (29%).
  - Around 1 in 5 (20%) adults reported being occasionally, hardly ever or never able to keep comfortably warm in their home (13% occasionally, 5% hardly ever and 2% never)
  - Around half (48%) of adults reported using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their home because of increases in the cost of living
  - Around 2 in 5 (41%) adults reported finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford their energy bills; this has decreased from 47% in a similar period a year ago (7 to 18 December 2022).
  - Over half (52%) reported their costs of living had increased compared to a month ago, with food and energy costs being the most cited source of the increase.

### Christmas Debt

- 4.2 Debt charity StepChange estimated that 2.6 million UK adults used credit to pay for essential household bills in the three months to December 2023. Nearly half of those with existing debt faced difficulty keeping up with household bills and credit commitments. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said a third of those it surveyed still had loans to pay off, prior to the Christmas period, which had originally been taken out to cover the costs of food, housing costs, energy bills or council tax.
- 4.3 A YouGov poll of more than 2,000 adults also found that an estimated 8% of the population - around four million people - will be relying on credit to cover their costs over the festive period. Typically, money advice providers have more queries in at the start of the year when Christmas bills for those who have used credit need to be paid. The period January – March 2023 was the busiest quarter ever for customer enquiries for Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau and was also the busiest of the year for advice provision by Advice Works.

### Buy Now Pay Later

- 4.4 Concerns have been raised about Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) options such as Klarna. Research by Citizens Advice found that 28% of adults in the UK were likely to use BNPL to pay for festive spending. The figure rose to 56% of parents with primary school aged children. They also found that those unable to cover the costs of their essentials, such as groceries and bills, are more likely to have been a regular user of BNPL in the last 12 months. In the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the charity's analysis found 11%

of BNPL users used the product to pay for groceries. This figure jumps to 35% for people who regularly use BNPL.

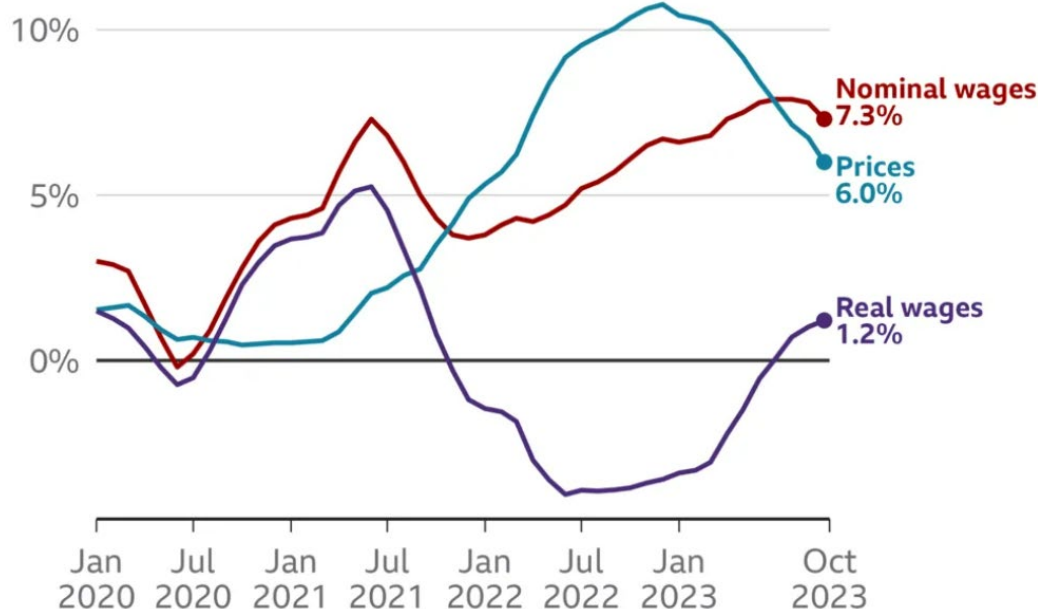
- 4.5 Citizens Advice has raised concerns as one in five (21%) BNPL users have missed or made a late BNPL payment in the last twelve months, and almost a third (29%) of BNPL users who were due to make a payment in the last month borrowed money to repay their instalments, meaning their initial debt is only leading to more debt.
- 4.6 Currently BNPL products and services are not regulated under the Financial Conduct Authority, who state that *'while BNPL products can provide a useful way to spread the cost of a purchase for some people, it's important that consumers are aware that many BNPL products remain unregulated. This means that firms, even if they are regulated by us for some of the products and services they offer, are not required to ensure that exempt BNPL products meet our rules, such as checking that a customer can afford to repay the loan.'* These customers also have fewer rights and protections, for example, they are unable to bring a complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service if something goes wrong.

## 5 Employment and Wages

- 5.1 The ONS has reported that on average regular pay excluding bonuses rose by 7.3% in the three months to October, compared with the same period a year earlier. That was a slight fall from the 7.7% increase seen in the previous quarter. Although earnings were not rising as quickly as they had been before, they were outpacing inflation, so wages were growing in real terms.

### Wage growth outpaces inflation

Annual pay and price rates, August-October average



Source: Office for National Statistics

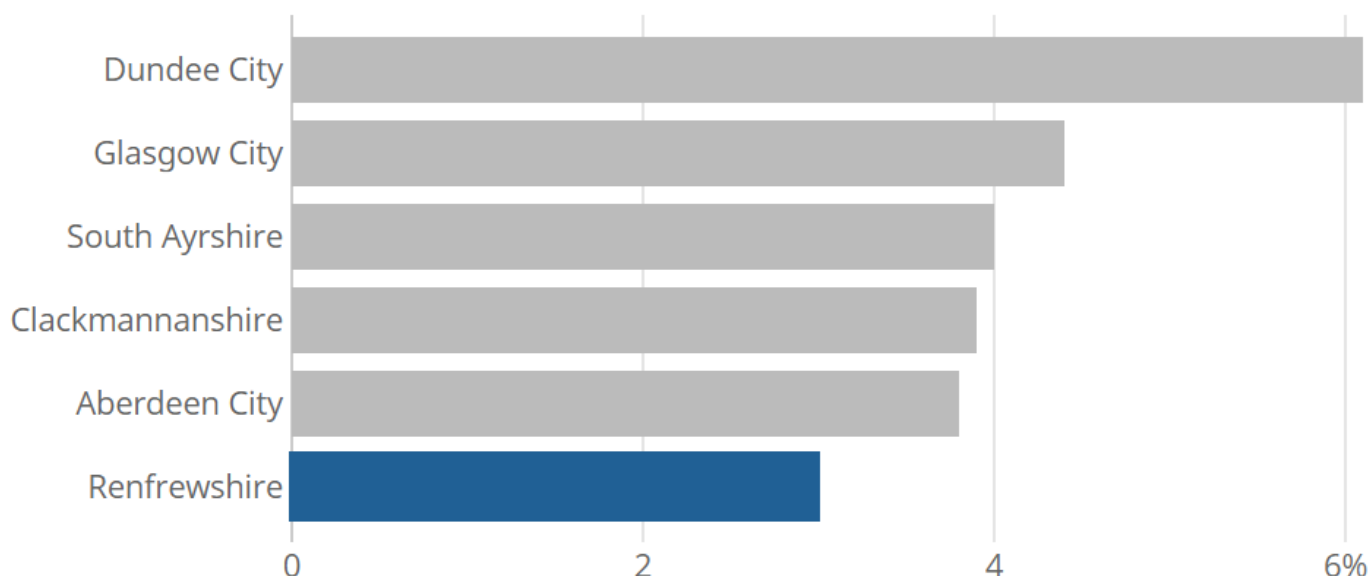




- 5.2 According to the ONS, the Claimant Count for those claiming unemployment-related benefits remained similar in September 23 compared with the previous year at 3.1%. This equates to 3550 people aged between 16 and 64. This is a slight reduction in the previous figure reported for July 2023, which was 3.3%.
- 5.3 Around 2,700 people aged 16 and over in Renfrewshire were unemployed in the year ending June 2023. This is a rate of 3.0%. This was a decrease compared with the year ending June 2022 when the unemployment rate was 3.3%. Unemployed people are those without jobs who are actively seeking work and available to take up a job.
- 5.4 Across Scotland, from the year ending June 2022 to the year ending June 2023, there was a slight decrease in the unemployment rate from 3.4% to 3.2%.

## Highest unemployment rates (%) of areas in Scotland, with Renfrewshire for comparison

Among those aged 16 and over and active in the labour market, year ending June 2023



Source: Model-based estimates of unemployment from the Office for National Statistics

## 6 Benefits

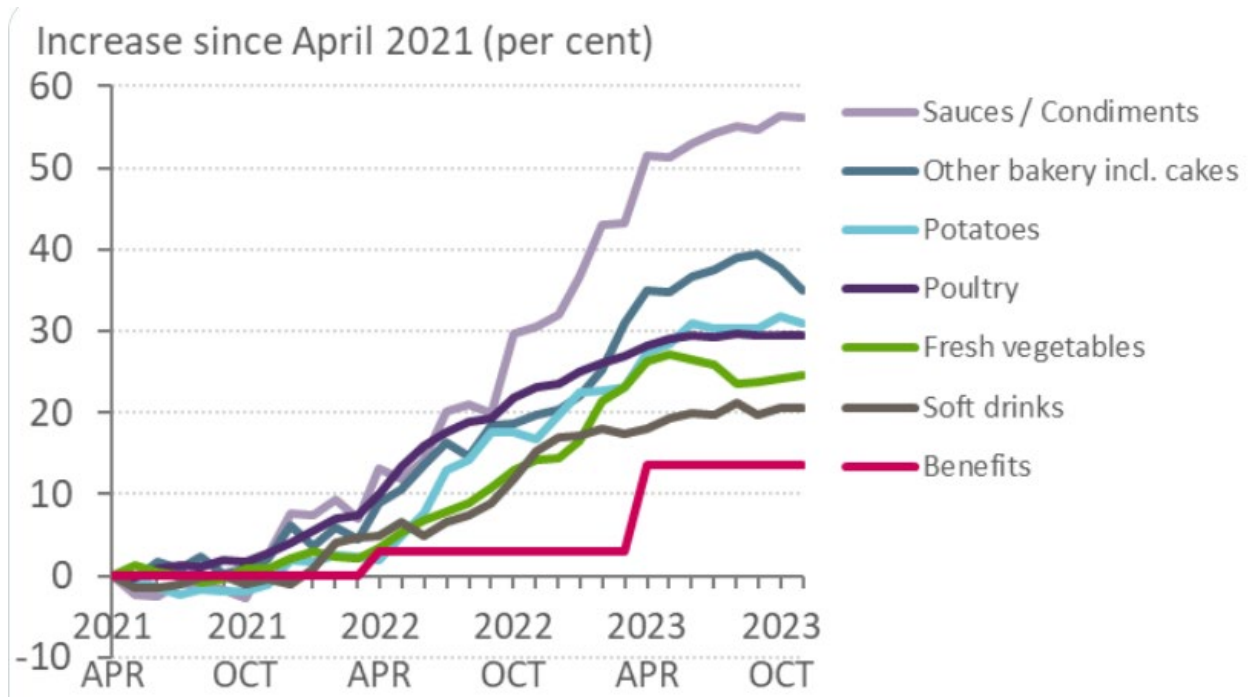
- 6.1 On 19 December 2023, the Deputy First Minister announced that all Scottish benefits would be uprated by the rate of inflation at September 23, an increase of 6.7%. This increase takes place in April, and includes the Scottish Child Payment which will rise from £25 to £26.70 per eligible child.
- 6.2 UK benefits will also rise by 6.7% from April 2024 excluding the basic and new State Pension which will be uprated in line with earnings and rise by 8.5%. Some examples of benefit rate increases are:

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Current rate</b>	<b>April 24 rate</b>	<b>Increase</b>
Child Benefit (2 Children) (weekly)	£39.90	£42.55	£2.65
Full Basic State Pension (weekly)	£156.20	£169.50	£13.30
Universal credit (single aged 25+) (monthly)	£368.74	£393.45	£24.71
Universal credit (couple, one aged 25+, 2 children) (monthly)	£1117.98	£1193.44	£75.46
Scottish Child Payment (weekly)	£25	£26.70	£1.70

## 7 Inflation

- 7.1 UK inflation as measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is currently standing at 4%, having risen slightly in December from the November 2023 figure and the first time it has risen since February 2023. The largest upward contribution was from alcohol and tobacco, and the largest downward contribution was from food and non-alcoholic beverages.
- 7.2 In November 2023 it was 3.9% which was the lowest annual rate of price rises in more than two years. A major factor in the reduction was a fall in average prices for both petrol and diesel. The ONS states in November 2023, the average price of petrol stood at 151p per litre, down from 163.6p per litre in the same month last year. Diesel prices have also reduced with the November 23 average price at 159p per litre, down from 187.9p in November 2022.
- 7.3 Inflation is now well below its peak in 2022, but it is still almost double the Bank of England's 2% target. The OBR forecasts that inflation will remain higher for longer, not easing to the Bank of England's target of 2% until 2025 – a year later than forecast in 2023.
- 7.4 The reduction is not consistent across all categories. The inflation rate for food and non-alcoholic drink has reduced to 8% from a recent high of 19.2% in March 2023, the highest annual rate seen for over 45 years. The December 2023 rate is the lowest since May 2022.
- 7.5 Although the rate at which food prices are rising has slowed, they remain high. The overall price of food and non-alcoholic beverages rose around 27% between November 2021 and November 2023. In the 10 years prior to this, overall food and non-alcoholic beverage prices rose by 9%. Prices in restaurants and cafes rose by 8.2% in the year to November 2023, down from 8.8% in October.
- 7.6 Despite easing inflation, more than 4 in 10 (41%) adults in Great Britain say they have spent more than usual to get what they normally buy when food shopping in an ONS survey which took place between 29 November and 10 December 2023. The survey also revealed that around half (46%) of adults said they were buying less food when shopping in the last two weeks.
- 7.7 Rising food costs was the most commonly reported reason among the 52% of adults who said their cost of living had risen compared with a month ago. Of those, 91% said one of the reasons for their rising costs was higher food shopping prices.

7.8 Analysis of the food inflation rate by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows inflation on the components of a Christmas dinner against benefit increases.

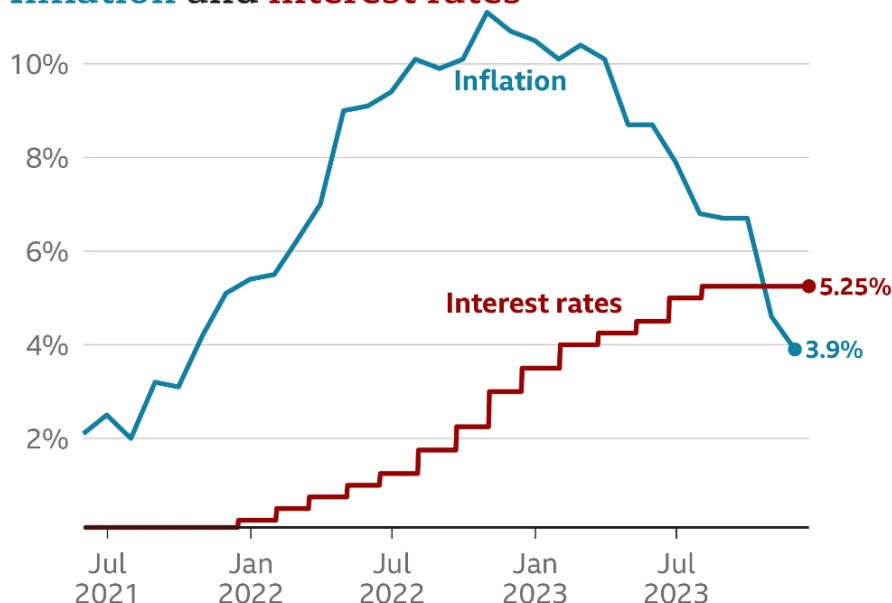


## 8 Interest Rates

8.1 The Bank of England has a target to keep inflation at 2%, but the current rate remains almost double that. The traditional response to rising inflation is to put up interest rates, and in August, the Bank increased interest rates for the 14th time in a row, taking the main rate to 5.25%.

8.2 It has held rates at that level at its three subsequent meetings in September, November and December, with the next review due in January 2024. The Bank of England has warned that interest rates will need to remain high in order to bring inflation down.

### Inflation and interest rates



Source: ONS, Bank of England. Last update: 20 Dec 2023.



8.3 Announcing its December decision, the Bank said there was "still some way to go" to bring inflation down "all the way back to 2%", and suggested rates were likely to remain at 5.25% for an extended period. However, the larger than expected fall in the November inflation figure has raised hopes that the Bank of England could cut interest rates sooner than expected.

## 9 Housing costs

9.1 According to the ONS, private rental prices have continued to grow across the whole of the UK. Overall rental prices have increased 6.2% in the year to November 2023. This is the largest annual percentage change since this UK data series began in January 2016.

9.2 A report from the estate agent, Hamptons<sup>1</sup>, stated that tenants have paid more than £85 billion in rent across the UK over the past year. This is more than double the figure of £40 billion in 2010. They point to the increase in numbers of households who are renting as well as the rise in rents caused by higher landlord mortgage costs. The average rent on a newly let property increased to £923 per month, £87 more than the same month last year and a 10.4% uplift.

9.3 For those buying or remortgaging, figures from the Building Society Association show the current average interest rates for various common mortgage products. The table shows the notable increase in mortgage interest rates since October 2021.

Mortgage Product	Loan to Value	Average Mortgage Interest Rate - September 2023	Average Mortgage Interest Rate - October 2022	Average Mortgage Interest Rate - October 2021
Two-year fixed-rate mortgage	95%	6.75%	6.44%	2.98%
Two-year fixed-rate mortgage	75%	5.94%	6.01%	1.29%
Three-year fixed-rate mortgage	75%	5.78%	5.90%	1.12%
Standard Variable Rate mortgage	N/A	7.93%	5.42%	3.6%

9.4 As previously reported to Elected Members, the comparatively high interest rates mean homebuyers and those remortgaging will have to pay a lot more than if they had taken out the same mortgage a year or more ago.

<sup>1</sup> [Record rental growth pushes annual rent bill to £85.6bn in 2023 | Estate Agents London | Letting Agents | South East England | Hamptons](#)

- 9.5 As people exit cheaper fixed rate deals on to products with much higher rates, monthly repayments can soar by hundreds of pounds. Banking trade body UK Finance says there are about 1.6 million deals expiring in 2024. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has warned that the higher interest rates could mean 1.4 million mortgage holders see their disposable income fall by more than 20%.
- 9.6 A number of lenders have cut mortgage rates in early 2024, including the UK's biggest lender, Halifax reducing its rate on a two-year fixed deal by 0.83 of a percentage point from 5.64% to 4.81%. HSBC have also announced cuts to mortgage rates across the board, including one five-year mortgage deal below 4%. It is expected that other lenders will follow suit and reduce their rates. While borrowers will likely still face a rise in payments, price increases may be mitigated by the availability of more competitive mortgage deals.
- 9.7 According to data from Pay.UK and Vocalink, average monthly mortgage payments made by Direct Debit have been rising steadily, from £880 in September 2023, £885 in October and £891 in November. The proportion of mortgage payments made by Direct Debit which failed because of insufficient funds in November remained high.
- 9.8 On 16th January 2024, an update report on homelessness in Renfrewshire was taken to the Council's Communities and Housing Policy Board which highlighted an upward trend in homeless applications over the last 3 years - a total of 935 applications were recorded in 2022/23, compared against 909 in 2021/22 and 834 in 2020/21. The more recent emerging housing pressures which are believed to largely stem from the impacts during the COVID recovery years, pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis, and since December 2022 from the suspension of the 'local connection' criteria for homeless applicants.
- 9.9 The Tenant's Support fund has since October been part of the range of assistance considered for local residents, a prerequisite for the fund is for officers to check tenants are in receipt of all the benefits that they may be entitled to in the first instance. In addition to income maximisation assessments and budgeting advice, officers support tenants to meet their long-term rent payment responsibilities. Since commencement of the fund in October to the end of November, there have been 96 Tenants referred for Tenant Support Fund assessments, which will have the added value of full income assessment and advice provision.

## **10 Fuel – Energy Costs for Households**

- 10.1 Support with energy bills will continue until at least March 2024, albeit at a reduced or scaled back level. The price cap applies to most households, and sets the maximum amount that suppliers can charge for a unit of energy. From 1 January 24, a typical dual-fuel household will pay £1,928 per annum. This is an increase in price per unit for both gas and electricity from the previous quarter, however standing charges for both have reduced very slightly.

	Energy price per unit 1 October to 31 December 2023	Energy price per unit 1 January to 31 March 2024
Electricity	27.35 pence per kWh 53.37 pence daily standing charge	28.62 pence per kWh 53.35 pence daily standing charge
Gas	6.89 pence per kWh 29.62 pence daily standing charge	7.42 pence per kWh 29.60 pence daily standing charge

- 10.2 Current predictions from Cornwall Insight indicate that the price cap rate may fall by around 16% to £1,620 a year for the period 1 April 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.
- 10.3 The cap is applied to customers on a default energy tariff including those who pay by Direct Debit, standard credit, prepayment meter, or who have an Economy 7 meter. It should be noted that the cap does not limit the total bill, which depends on energy consumption, only the amount charged per unit.
- 10.4 Ofgem is proposing lifting the energy price cap by £16 between April 2024 and March 2025 to cover customers' bad debts. Although under the proposals, households using prepayment meters would not be charged the extra sum, which works out at £1.33 per month. These consumers pay as they go, meaning they cannot build up debt in the same way as households that are billed monthly.
- 10.5 The amount of debt and arrears faced by gas and electricity customers increased to £2.9bn between July and September 2023, up from £1.9bn in the same period in 2022. Households in arrears - where a customer owes a supplier but has not worked out a payment plan - make up the vast majority of the overall figure, at more than £2bn. Customers in debt, who have a repayment agreement with their energy company, totalled £830m.
- 10.6 The direct debit failure rates for Electricity and Gas over the last 2 months have been the highest since records have been kept at 1.30% and 1.21% in October and November. The rate in October 2021, roughly when the cost of living crisis began, was 0.52% and the rate has steadily risen since then.
- 10.7 Despite the government providing help for all households, including a £400 payment through the Energy Bill Support Scheme last winter, Ofgem said: "We have nevertheless seen debt levels rise as people struggle to meet the costs of higher bills." In recent YouGov polling commissioned by Citizens Advice Scotland, and reported in November 2023, 31% of

respondents said they were worried or anxious about heating their homes adequately in the coming months. Likewise, 48% of respondents identified energy bills as their most significant financial concern this winter.

## 11 Wider research

- 11.1 In December 2023, the Centre for Social Justice published the following report : - State of Poverty in the UK. The thinktank noted some of the progress that has been made in terms of addressing poverty in past two decades in terms of aspects such as employability, however noted that those experiencing more significant levels of poverty are further from benefiting from these improvements, with entrenched and enduring poverty becoming much more complex for households across the UK.
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### Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – There are no financial implications associated with this report, which provides an overview of the position and is for noting.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – This report provides a detailed summary of the current evidence relating to household income and expenditure. Wider poverty related issues are a key element of both the Council and Community Plan and the information included within this report is part of the wider Strategic Needs Assessment for these plans.
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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**To:** Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

**On:** 31 January 2024

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**Report by:** Chief Executive

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**Heading:** Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Update

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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.
- 1.3. Work on priorities has continued with this paper containing updates on:
  - Winter Connections
  - Scottish Government Council Tax Debt Pilot Project
  - The Stronger Start project
  - School support service
  - Lived Experience Panel
  - Child poverty deep dive
  - Breakfast club provision

## 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 Scottish Government Council Tax Debt Pilot Project**

4.1 In November 2023, Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (RCAB) approached the Council to collaborate in a Council Tax Debt Pilot. The Bureau had bid for the opportunity to participate in this Pilot, which is funded through the Scottish Government, as one of three areas in Scotland. 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.

4.2.1 The pilot is informed by the best practice recommendations in the Collaborative Council Tax Collection Guide which was produced and distributed by the Improvement Service to local authorities in 2022 and runs from now until 31 March 2024.

4.3 The aims of the pilot are to test the best practice guidance in Collaborative Council Tax Collection to:

- Understand barriers and challenges to implementation.
- Work collaboratively to develop solutions.
- Improve people's experience of council tax payment and debt collection.
- Develop a "toolkit" that can be used in further funded activity.

4.4 The outcomes of the pilot will be provided through an evaluation report which will collate the learnings and achieved outcomes, whilst recognising the short time frames involved. Regular meetings will take place between relevant Council Officers and RCAB staff, with the initial meeting having taken place in mid-December.

#### **Special Needs in Pregnancy service – Stronger Start**

4.5 As previously reported to the Sub-Committee, Renfrewshire Council has been working with Renfrewshire HSCP, NHSGGC 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 after Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau were 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 Work has continued to commence this 'Stronger Start' service, with staff recruited and meetings with midwives taking place, referral processes confirmed as well as a location for the service within the hospital being agreed. Three newly appointed Stronger Start Staff started their posts on 17th January. These staff will receive a robust induction process, including NHS GG&C Mandatory Training.
- 4.7 The Improvement Service has agreed to carry out evaluation of the project, as if the project is shown as successful at addressing the needs of pregnant women with complex needs, further funding will be sought and having robust, external evaluation will help to make a case with potential funders.
- 4.8 A Steering Group formed from Renfrewshire Citizens Advice, Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire HSCP along with NHSGGC and Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire HSCPs continue to meet to support implementation and performance of this project which will offer income maximisation advice and 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.

### **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 Christmas break there had been 87 contacts from parents, 62 appointments had been attended across schools, and there were a number of cancelled appointments and 'no shows'. This is despite automated reminder texts/emails being sent. The no shows are being examined to see if there are any patterns in those not attending or whether additional support can be offered.
- 4.10 The busiest areas for advice have been benefits Reasons for appointments have been varied, with advice and support provided around benefits, mainly Adult Disability Payments and Universal Credit. The second busiest area for advice has been housing, including homelessness.
- 4.11 Minimal Client Financial Gain (CFG) for clients has been recorded so far. This can be because of the timescales involved in processing benefit applications. It is expected more significant CFGs will be recorded as the project progresses. Feedback from schools has been excellent, with schools reporting that they and parents have found the service to be a valuable resource and that parents have felt supported by the adviser.
- 4.12 The Family Advice Service for younger children, provided by Advice Works, will commence early this year. After the work done with families claiming Free School Meals in 2023, the next stage is offering support to parents through referral from schools, including for those families with school meal debt.

### **Winter Connections**

- 4.13 After the success of the Winter Connections programme in 2022/23, the new programme for winter 23/24 launched 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.

- 4.14 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
- 4.15 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.
- 4.16 To the end of December, 43 applications for funding have been approved by the Head of Policy and Partnerships, with over £80,000 allocated to projects. Officers are continuing to work with community groups in areas with gaps to maximise use of funding, 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. A full list of applications is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.17 At the Leadership Board on 6 December 2023, members also approved funding of £6,000 from Fairer Renfrewshire funding to 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 and cup soups to all those attending the library as well as snacks at selected childrens' activities.

### **Lived Experience Panel**

- 4.18 The Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee has been given a number of updates relating to work of the Fairer Renfrewshire Panel. Their last meeting of the year in December 2023 was used to look back at achievements over the first full year the panel has met and decide priorities for 2024.
- 4.19 The first meeting of the Panel in January 2024 will be 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.
- 4.20 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 meeting will be used to discuss this initiative and wider digital exclusion.
- 4.21 The Panel are keen to explore the issue of breakfast club provision and have highlighted this as priority at a recent session.

### **Child poverty – deep dive activity**

- 4.22 Work has now commenced on a child poverty deep dive exercise at a Community Planning Partnership level, with the kick off discussion scheduled at its next meeting on 22 January. Partners will be asked to consider their current activity and intelligence on child poverty at a strategic level, and then to consider how we could work differently with the resources available going forward. A particular focus will be on considering how resources are and could be targeted to support families in the child poverty priority groups.

4.23 A partnership meeting is also being scheduled in February to commence a geographical or locality based deep dive exercise on child poverty in Gallowhill. Further updates on these exercises will be provided to the sub-committee at a future meeting.

## 5 Breakfast snack provision

5.1 At the Leadership Board on 6 December 2023, further information was requested by Councillor Ann Dowling on the breakfast snack pilots which have been operating more recently in Renfrewshire. It was agreed that information would be provided through a report to the Fairer Renfrewshire sub-committee.

5.2 Breakfast “club” type provision operates across primary establishments as follows:

- 9 Tackling Poverty funded breakfast clubs
- 11 School and Environment, Housing & Infrastructure run breakfast clubs
- 7 school only run clubs
- 10 Out of School Care clubs

5.3 Currently breakfast service is available to purchase within Secondary school establishments, with Magic Breakfast, a charity run service, providing funding directly to Johnstone High School and Trinity High School to provide a free option. These operate with no involvement by Soft FM.

5.4 In July 2023 a pilot was implemented across 4 primary school locations providing a fully compliant healthy snack option each day to **all** pupils.

- St Charles Primary school
- Williamsburgh Primary School
- Gallowhill Primary School and
- St Catherine’s Primary School

5.5 These schools were chosen to assess how it would work in practice (food cooked on-site/off-site) and if clubs already in place had an impact on the uptake of the snack.

5.6 Almost 1200 pupils are able to benefit from the healthy snack option each morning. Fruit is provided 3 days a week (apples/oranges/bananas) and snacks are cereal bars and popcorn-based snacks, which are all compliant with foods regulations. The snacks required to be chosen and issued appropriately to ensure they complied with allergen requirements.

5.7 Some evidence is emerging of positive outcomes with minimal returns of fruit and no returns of healthy school compliant snack and is continuing to be delivered within these 4 locations. This provision requires minimal staff resource as the snacks are collected at the kitchen by pupils and taken to each classroom prior to the morning break. However, it should be noted that with food costs having increased in recent years, the cost of the project requires to be evaluated in conjunction with outcomes achieved. Officers have started to engage with the schools to get feedback from the Head Teacher, staff and parents and carers to assess the success from their standpoint.

5.8 Work is also currently underway to discuss and explore how the initial findings from the pilot programme can inform future proposals relating to the development of breakfast provision in Renfrewshire.

## **6. Wider developments and next steps**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 A key aim during 2024 will be the continued development of the programme beyond the immediate cost of living crisis, with a particular focus on considering local activities and priorities in relation to New Scots and people with a disability. Proposals are being developed to fund and recruit an equalities development resource to support this programme of work, and it is also intended that the previous community impact survey undertaken at different points over the past 3 years, be repeated in the first half of 2024. This will ensure more detailed and current information is available to support the targeting of partnership activities through Fairer Renfrewshire.

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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

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## Appendix 1 – Winter Connections Grant Funding

<b>Applications Approved under delegated authority by Head of Policy and Partnerships</b>				
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Funding Requested</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Funding proposed for approval</b>
Active Communities Scotland Ltd	Johnstone	£2,000	<b>Family Game and Grub -</b>	£2,000
Erskine Arts	Erskine	£2,000	<b>Soup Sessions</b>	£2,000
Rays of Hope	Elderslie	£2,000	<b>Rays of Hope Winter Project 2023</b>	£2,000
Renfrew YMCA SCIO	Renfrew	£2,000	<b>Connect and Chat</b>	£2,000
RIG Arts	Paisley	£1,998.50	<b>Creativity in Mind Seedhill</b>	£1,998.50
Twist and Hit Cheerleaders	Paisley	£2,050	<b>Winter Youth Club 2023-24</b>	£2,000
Thorn Athletic Community Trust	Johnstone	£1,500	<b>Wake Up, Warm Up</b>	£1,500
Brick Lane Music Academy	Paisley	£2,000	<b>Music Friendship Café</b>	£2,000
Friends of Howwood Park	Howwood	£2,000	<b>Village Winter Activities</b>	£2,000
Just Dive In CIC	Paisley and Johnstone	£2,000	<b>Aquatic Inclusivity for Winter Wellness</b>	£2,000
Johnstone Castle Learning Centre	Johnstone	£2,000	<b>Winter Connections</b>	£2,000
Linwood Community Council	Linwood	£2,000	<b>Winter Connections</b>	£2,000
KLAS Care CIC	Linwood	£1,980	<b>Winter Family Fun</b>	£1,980
Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies	Shortroods	£2,000	<b>Smiles in Shortroods</b>	£2,000
Brick Lane Music Academy	Gallowhill	£2,000	<b>Gallowhill All Ages Community Choir -</b>	£2,000
Home-Start Renfrewshire & Inverclyde	Paisley	£2,000	<b>Winter Warmer with HSRI</b>	£2,000
STAR Project	Paisley	£2,000	<b>STAR Winter Connections</b>	£2,000
ROAR Connections for Life Ltd	Johnstone	£2,000	<b>Jam Jar Movies at Station Seven</b>	£2,000
Friends of Barshaw Park	Paisley	£2,000	<b>Barshaw Winter Community Activities</b>	£2,000
Glasgow Community Circus	Paisley Ferguslie Park	£2,000	<b>Winter Wellbeing Circus Project</b>	£2,000
Our Place Our Families	Renfrew	£2,000	<b>Café OPOF</b>	£2,000
Linwood Baptist Church	Linwood	£2,000	<b>Connections</b>	£2,000
Renfrewshire Effort to Empower Minorities (REEM)	Paisley	£2,000	<b>Winter Wellbeing Project</b>	£2,000
The Thursday Club	Paisley Glenburn	£2,000	<b>Winter Warmer Project -</b>	£2,000
Paisley Methodist Church	Paisley	£2,000	<b>The Saturday Get-Together</b>	£2,000
St Mark's (Oldhall) Church of Scotland	Paisley	£2,000	<b>Winter Connection Wednesday Welcome -</b>	£2,000
Kilbarchan Improvement Project	Kilbarchan	£1,200	<b>Winter Movies</b>	£1,200
Howwood Community Council	Howwood	£2,000	<b>Winter Warmer Programme</b>	£2,000
Foxbar Elderly Forum		£2,000	<b>Lunchtime Buddies</b>	£2,000

Kickin' On		£2,000	<b>Unit 23 Social Space</b>	£2,000
Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust	Lochwinnoch	£2,000	<b>Youth Drop In Sessions</b>	£2,000
Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust	Lochwinnoch	£1,960	<b>Men's Shed &amp; Teenage Health &amp; Wellbeing Workshops</b>	£1,960
CREATE Paisley	Linwood	£1,580	<b>CREATE Opportunities Youth Programme</b>	£360
Mountain Ash Club	Paisley	£1,900	<b>Blether &amp; Brunch</b>	£850
Sewing2gether All Nations	Paisley	£1,360	<b>Winter Connections at Sewing2gether All Nations</b>	£1,360
School of African Cultures	Paisley	£2,000	<b>Sakana / Play</b>	£2,000
St Vincent's Hospice Ltd	Howwood/Spateston	£1,730	<b>St Vincent's Hospice Winter Connections</b>	£1,730
Pachedu	Paisley	£2,000	<b>WICE Winter Sewing to Connect</b>	£2,000
Langbank Swingpark Regeneration	Langbank	£1,040	<b>Soup &amp; Sandwich at the Village Hall</b>	£1,040
Loud n Proud	Paisley	£1,980	<b>When Music Was Music</b>	£1,980
Ralston Primary Out of School Care	Paisley	£1,585	<b>Lego Spike!</b>	£1,585
The Bungalow CIC	Paisley	£1,950	<b>Movie Club</b>	£1,950
Scottish Afro Caribbean Arts Association (SACAA)	Paisley	£2,040	<b>Winter Unity</b>	£2,000
Langbank Swingpark Regeneration	Langbank	£915	<b>MUGA – Get Active!</b>	£915
Inchinnan Development Trust	Inchinnan	£1,749	<b>Nature Craft &amp; Create</b>	£1,749

#### Applications not recommended for approval

Organisation	Area	Name	Funding Requested	Decision
Finding Your Feet	Paisley	Physical Wellbeing Programme	£2,000	No funding award – application relates to existing project. Referred to other funding sources.
Street Connect	Paisley	Community Connections	£2,000	No funding award – does not meet criteria as application relates to staffing costs to recruit worker. Referred to other funding sources.
Shopmobility	Renfrewshire	Winter Warm Up Together	£2,000	No funding award - does not meet criteria as it relates to a series of five one-off events in different locations.
Kilinside Evangelical Church	Paisley	Community Connections	£1,860	No funding award - does not meet criteria as it does not provide a regular scheduled activity. Referred to other funding sources.
Return to Life SCIO		Keep Warm Without the Fear	£2,000	No funding award - does not meet criteria as it does not provide a hot snack/lunch or activities and is not located in Renfrewshire, or specifically for Renfrewshire residents. Referred to another funding source.
West End Community Centre	Paisley	West End Warm Hub	£2,000	



				No funding award – does not meet criteria as there is no specific additional free activity being offered. Referred to other funding sources.
The Welcoming Renfrewshire Family Group	Renfrew	The Welcoming	£2,000	No funding award – does not meet criteria as it is for a one-off event. Referred to other funding sources.
Afghan Families	Paisley	Afghan Families Gathering	£1,000	No funding award – does not meet criteria as the group is not constituted. Referred to Engage Renfrewshire to source alternative funding.
Calder United Free Church of Scotland	Lochwinnoch	Warm Space Refreshments and Blether	£750	No funding award – does not meet criteria as there is no specific activity offered and Lochwinnoch is already well served by Winter Connections projects.
Open Aye CIC	Lochwinnoch	Renfrewshire Winter Wellbeing of the Woods - RenWinWow	£2,000	No funding award – does not meet criteria as it is not open to everyone and costs versus delivery was expensive.
St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation	Paisley	Buddie Big Scran	£2,000	No funding award – programme was funded through an alternative source.

