

Notice of Meeting and Agenda Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-committee

Date	Time	Venue
Wednesday, 05 June 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

Webcasting of Meeting

This meeting will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site – at the start of the meeting the Convener will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being filmed. To find the webcast please navigate to

<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.

- | | | |
|-------------|---|----------------|
| 1(a) | Cost of Living Update | 1 - 14 |
| | Report by Chief Executive. | |
| 1(b) | Cost of Living Dashboard | 15 - 32 |
| | Report by Chief Executive. | |
| 2 | Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Update | 33 - 40 |
| | Report by Chief Executive. | |
| 3 | Winter Connections Evaluation | 41 - 76 |
| | Report by Chief Executive. | |
| 4 | Summer of Fun Progress Update | |
| | Presentation by Chief Executive. | |



To: Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

On: 5 June 2024

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Cost-of-living Update

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 27 March 2024, there have been a number of changes in economic factors including a decrease in the Energy Price Cap from 1 April 24, meaning households will pay less for their energy use, while inflation has decreased to 2.3% since the last Sub-Committee meeting and interest rates have remained the same. Elected members are asked to note that:
- The rate of inflation has reduced to 2.3% (April 24), still above the 2% target set by the Bank of England
 - The inflation rate for food has continued to reduce; now 4%.
 - The Bank of England has kept the interest rate unchanged at 5.25%. The rate has been at this level since August 2023. The next review will be 20 June 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 £1,690 from the 1 April until 30 June. This is the lowest rate for 2 years, with the cap for July-September 2024 now set at £1,568 per year before being forecast to rise again in October.
- 1.3 This paper provides an overview of information collated by officers in relation 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 27 March 2024 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 food inflation, costs for households are still high. In March 24, in a revised forecast, the OBR stated it expected living standards to recover more quickly than in their November 2023 forecast which was reported to Sub-Committee, and grow by around 1% a year on average. It now expects real household disposable income per person to recover its pre-pandemic peak by 2025/26, two years earlier than in the November forecast.
- 3.3. The Office for National Statistics April '*Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain bulletin*' reported that 87% of adults see the cost of living as an important issue facing the UK.

4. Impacts of cost-of-living crisis

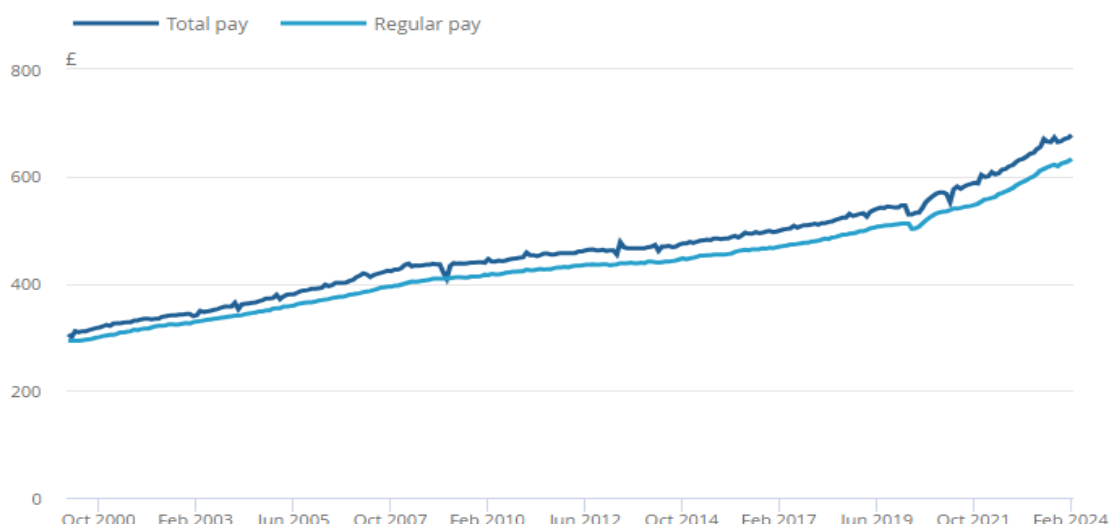
Living costs

- 4.1. The latest insights into the cost of living from the Office of National Statistics in April found:
- Around 4 in 10 (40%) reported it was very or somewhat difficult to afford their rent or mortgage payments. in the latest period. This figure was 30% in March 2022.
 - Around 1 in 25 adults reported that their household had run out of food in April and couldn't afford to buy more, remaining at a stable figure from that reported in the last Sub-Committee report.
- 4.2. In a poll carried out by the Mental Health Foundation in November 2023:
- 32% of Scottish adults felt anxious about their financial situation in the last month .
 - 12% of Scottish adults accumulated debt of £3000 paying essential bills in the previous 12 months. adults in Great Britain reported using less fuel, such as gas or electricity, in their homes because of the rising cost of living.
 - 34% said that in the last 12 months the increased cost of living (paying bills, rent/mortgage, buying food etc) caused them to begin or increase unsecured debt (e.g. credit cards, bank loans, payday lenders, loan from family or friends)

5. Employment and Wages

- 5.1. According to the ONS, the Claimant Count, which is taken from JobcentrePlus administration systems, for those claiming unemployment-related benefits in Renfrewshire fell slightly in March 2024 to 3.1% compared with the December figure which was revised to 3.2%. This equates to 3,590 people aged between 16 and 64 and is down from March 2023, when there were 3,825 claimants.
- 5.2. Around 25,100 people or 22.4% of the population aged 16 to 64 years in Renfrewshire were "economically inactive" in the year ending December 2023. This is a reduction when compared with around 29,400 people (25.9%) in the year ending December 2022. People are classed as "economically inactive" if they are not in employment but don't meet the criteria for being "unemployed". This means they have not been seeking work within the previous four weeks or were unable to start work within the next two weeks. Common reasons include being retired, looking after the home or family or being temporarily or long-term sick and disabled.
- 5.3. The April 24 Glasgow City Region economic briefing highlights that the biggest contributor to economic inactivity in the area is now due to those looking after family, with economic inactivity due to ill-health decreasing.
- 5.4. Economic inactivity in Renfrewshire is lower than across Scotland, where 22.5% of people aged 16 to 64 years were economically inactive during the year ending December 2023. Economic inactivity in Great Britain is 21.2%.
- 5.5. The ONS has reported that on average regular pay excluding bonuses rose by 6.0% in the three months to February 24, compared with the same period a year earlier. That was a slight fall from the 6.2% increase seen in the previous quarter. Annual growth in real terms (adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH)) for regular pay was 1.9%, and for total pay was 1.6%.
- 5.6. Annual growth in both total pay and regular pay (excluding bonuses) remains strong and shows a steady increase over the long term. Average weekly earnings were estimated at £677 for total earnings and £633 for regular earnings in February 2024. The median annual earnings for Scotland in 2023 were £35,518, higher than the UK average of £34,963.

**Average weekly earnings in Great Britain, seasonally adjusted, January
2000 to February 2024**



5.7. For those earning the National Minimum wage, this increased from 1 April, however the rate is dependent on age. For apprentices, or those aged 16-17 the hourly rate is £6.40, for those aged 18-20 the rate is £8.60, and for those 21+ the rate is £11.44.

Tax and National Insurance

5.8. In April 2024, there were no changes to the Starter, Basic, Intermediate and Higher Rates of tax in Scotland. Additionally, for Higher Rate taxpayers, the threshold will stay the same at £43,663. For those earning between £75,001 and £125,140, a new ‘Advanced Rate’ band was introduced. Those in this band will pay 45% tax, up from 42% in 2023/24. The top rate of tax for those earning more than £125,140 will also go up from 47% to 48%.

5.9. Income Tax isn’t paid at the same rate on all an individual’s income. It’s paid at the rate of Income Tax on the income in the particular bracket only. For example, for someone earning £52,000 a year, the Income Tax paid works out like this:

Income	Income Tax band	Tax you pay
Up to £12,570	Zero rate	No Income Tax on first £12,570
£12,571 to £14,876	Starter rate	19% Income Tax on next £2,305 (£14,876 - £12,571 = £2,305)
£14,733 to £25,688	Basic rate	20% Income Tax on next £11,684 (£26,561 - £14,877 = £11,684)
£25,689 to £43,662	Intermediate rate	21% Income Tax on next £17,100 (£43,662 - £26,562 = £17,100)
£43,663 to £125,140	Higher rate	42% Income Tax on next £8,337 (£52,000 - £43,663 = £8,337)

5.10. The main rate of employee National Insurance was cut by 2p, from 10% to 8% from April 2024 for earnings between £12,570 and £50,270. 3p was also cut from the main rate of self employed

National Insurance, down from 9% to 6%. There was no change to the 2% national Insurance rate for those who earn more than £50,270 and those earning below £12,570 pay no National Insurance.

- 5.11. Those earning the most, will save the most in National Insurance, as the table below from Money Saving Expert illustrates.

How much you'll pay in NICs if you're employed				
Annual salary	Annual cost at rates between 6 April 2023 and 5 January 2024	Annual cost at rates from 6 January 2024 to 5 April 2024	Annual cost at rates from 6 April 2024 to 5 April 2025	Annual saving from 6 April 2024 compared to now
£25,000	£1,491.60	£1,243	£994.40	£248.60
£35,000	£2,691.60	£2,243	£1,794.40	£448.60
£50,000	£4,491.60	£3,743	£2,994.40	£748.60
£75,000	£5,018.60	£4,264.60	£3,510.60	£754
£85,000	£5,218.60	£4,464.60	£3,710.60	£754
£100,000	£5,518.60	£4,764.60	£4,010.60	£754

6. Benefits

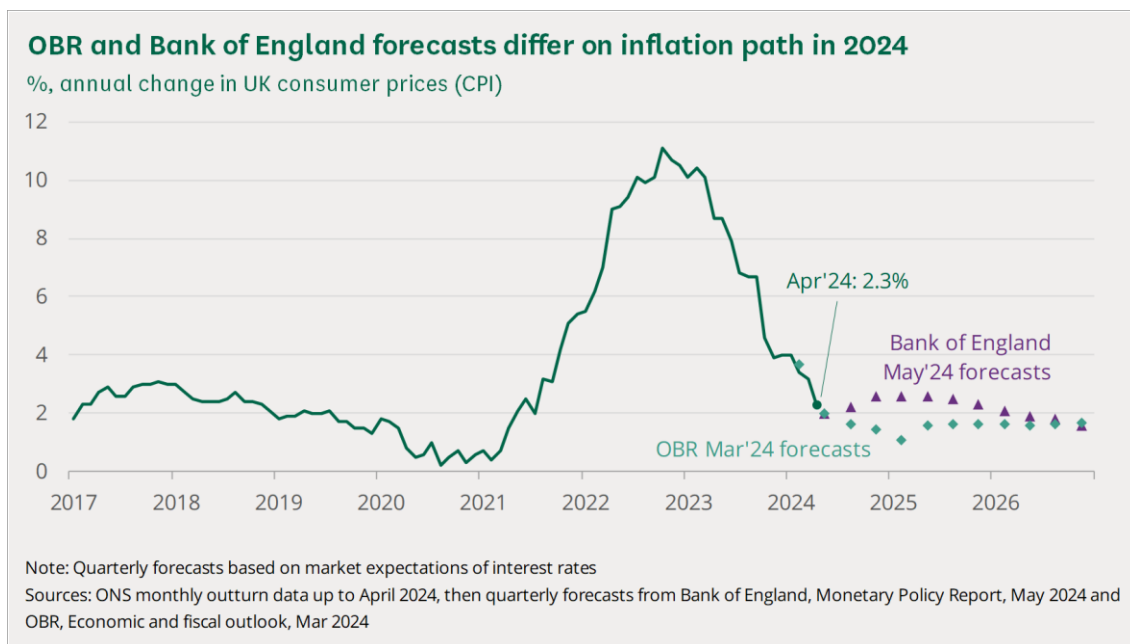
- 6.1. From April 2024, Department for Work and Pensions benefits that are linked to inflation were uprated by 6.7%, as were those administered by the Scottish Government and inflation-linked tax credits elements and benefits administered by HM Revenue and Customs. For 2024/25 the basic State Pension and new State Pension were increased by 8.5% in line with earnings growth.
- 6.2. There was also a change to Child Benefit for high earners, with the threshold for the High Income Child Benefit Charge, under which a percentage of Child benefit is lost, increasing to £60,000, with no benefit payable when earnings reach £80,000. The previous threshold was £50,000, with the benefit being extinguished when earnings reached £60,000. Child benefit is currently £25.60 per week for an eldest or only child and £16.95 for additional children.

7. Inflation and the Impact on Households

- 7.1. UK consumer prices, as measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) were 2.3% higher in April 2024 than a year before, down from 3.2% in March 2024. This fall was largely driven by the fall in energy prices, although a slightly smaller fall than forecast due to inflation rates within the services sector remaining higher than expected. The UK's annual inflation rate is expected to continue falling in 2024, though more gradually than in 2023, due to lower energy prices and reduced inflation in consumer goods and food. The average forecast among economists

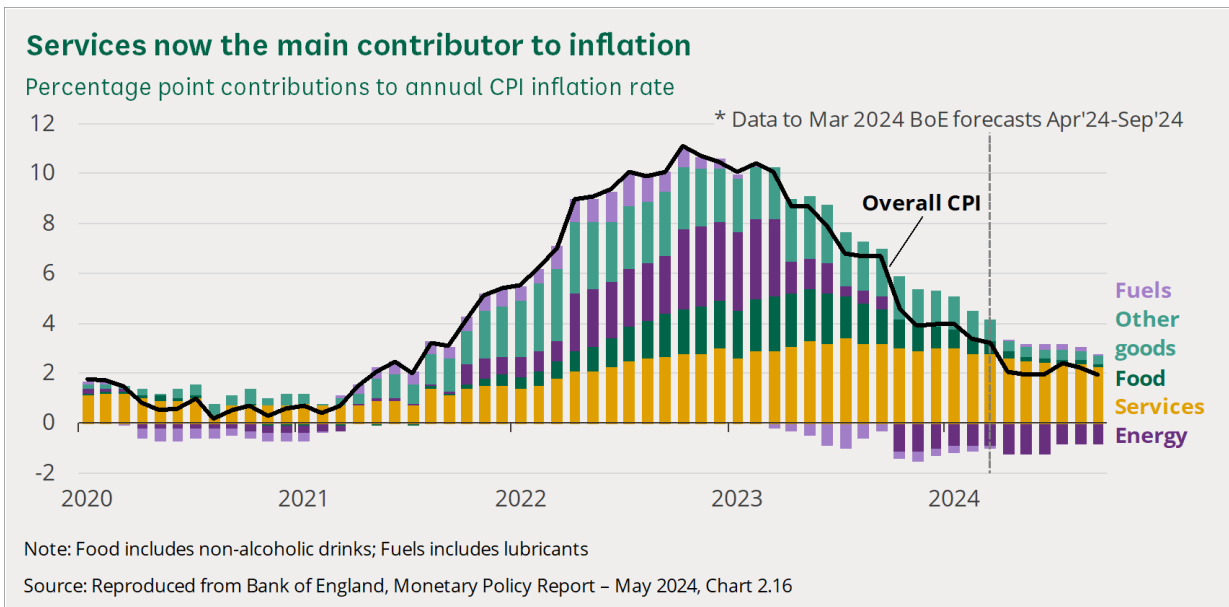
surveyed by the Treasury in the first half of April 2024 was for inflation to be 2.2% in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2024.

7.2. As previously reported, a falling inflation rate does not mean that price levels are falling. It means that prices are rising, but more slowly than they were before. For example, if the annual inflation rate is 3%, this means prices are rising by 3% compared with a year before. The independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published new forecasts for the economy and public finances on 6 March 2024. As shown in the chart below, the OBR now forecasts inflation to fall further and faster than it previously forecast in November, largely because of falling energy prices. Inflation is forecast to decline to 2.0% in Q2 2024, thereby hitting the Bank of England’s 2% target one year earlier than the OBR forecast in November. Inflation is then forecast to remain below 2% until Q3 2027.



7.3. Also important to the inflation outlook is the ability and willingness of firms to pass on higher costs by raising their prices; if firms increase their prices, it is less likely that inflation will fall. This depends on several factors, including the strength of consumer demand, the degree of competition, current input costs and future expectations of costs. Reports received by Bank of England officials from businesses suggest that profits “remain squeezed” and there is scepticism among firms that normal profit margins can be restored in 2024 given the weak economic outlook, meaning they may be less likely to increase prices as much as they want.

7.4. While global factors were the original drivers of high inflation, price rises in many areas of the domestic economy have also accelerated. This is partly due to strong pay growth, with labour costs making up a large share of costs for many firms, particularly in the services sectors.

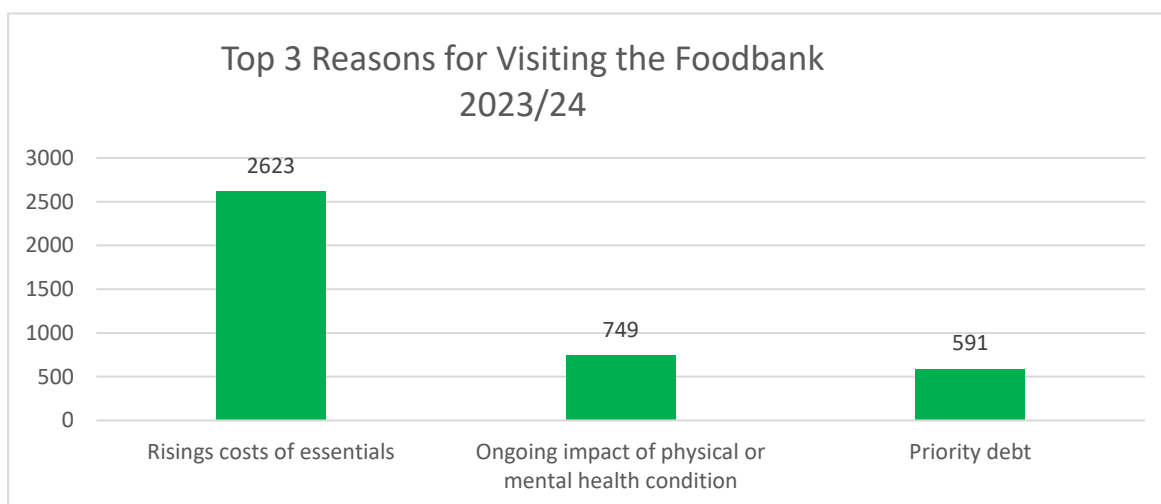


- 7.5. A regular survey of business conducted by ONS in early April 2024 reported that 16% of firms expect to raise the prices of goods and services they sell in the month ahead (May 2024 in this case), up somewhat from late 2023 (approximately 13%). A survey of UK business leaders conducted in January 2024 by the Boston Consulting Group's Centre for Growth found that 77% of them expected to raise prices in 2024, with over half (52%) saying they will increase them by more than 6%.
- 7.6. According to an Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey carried out in April 2024, 57% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living compared to the previous month. This is an increase from the 46% reported to the last Sub-Committee in figures from January and February 2024.
- 7.7. Of those adults, 90% reported an increase in food shopping, with those affected shopping around more and cutting back on spending on non-essentials. 56% had noticed an increase in gas and electricity bills, with 41% of those using less fuel. In addition, 28% of those who had noticed an increase were using their savings and 16% were using credit more than usual.
- 7.8. When asked in the same survey whether they would be able to pay an unexpected cost of £850, 25% would not. This rose to 29% in the 30 – 49 age group and fell to 14% in the over 70 age group. Women were less likely than men to be able to find this amount. In addition, women were slightly more likely to have used more credit than usual.

Food Inflation

- 7.9. UK food and non-alcoholic drink prices were 2.9% higher in April 2024 compared with the previous year, based on the CPI measure of inflation. This continued the decline from the recent peak of 19.1% in March 2023, which was the highest rate of increase in food prices since 1977 according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

- 7.10. Over the two years from March 2022 to March 2024 food prices rose by 23.9%. It previously took over 12 years, from September 2009 to March 2022, for average food prices to rise by the same amount. Analysis by the ONS in April 2022 noted supply chain challenges, rising costs like energy costs and increased transport costs, and labour shortages led to rising food and drink prices as well as global supply disruptions and the weather in Europe and North Africa leading to higher imported food prices.
- 7.11. In the Bank of England’s February Monetary report, the Bank of England’s network of agents, who gather information from businesses across the UK, reported “clear evidence” that food price inflation would continue to ease.
- 7.12. Renfrewshire Foodbank issued 5,267 vouchers in total in 2023/24, in comparison with 5288 the previous year, a slight decrease of 0.4%. The vouchers covered 6724 adults and 2891 children this year, which was an increase in total number receiving assistance with 9615 compared to 9581 last year (6672 adults and 2909 children).
- 7.13. In 2023/24, the rising costs of essentials was cited as the number one reason for voucher issue in Renfrewshire, at 2,673 times. The ongoing impact of a physical or mental health condition was the second most cited reason for voucher issue, at 749 times, closely followed by debt cited nearly 600 times.



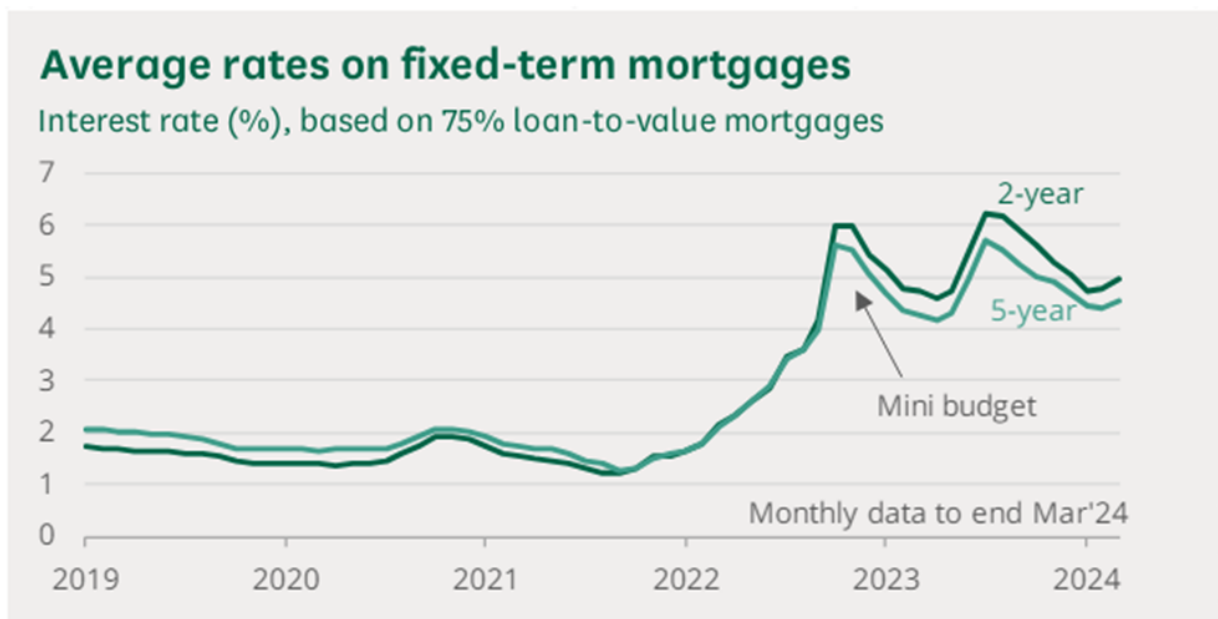
- 7.14. Renfrewshire Foodbank has recently opened an extended their Paisley distribution on a Wednesday afternoon to 18.45 to ensure people who are employed can access. They report that numbers of employed service users had risen. For 23/24 almost 400 people who were employed, 196 of these with wages as their sole income, used the Foodbank. We do not have figures for 22/23 year for a comparison, however will continue to collect these figures going forward.

8. Interest Rates

- 8.1. The Bank of England has a target to keep inflation at 2%, but the current rate remains higher than this. The Bank of England has increased interest rates at 14 consecutive policy meetings from 0.1% in December 2021 to 5.25% in August 2023 to try to reduce interest rates. At its subsequent

meetings the Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) left interest rates unchanged at 5.25%. The next announcement on interest rates will be 20 June.

- 8.2. As reported in the last Sub-Committee report financial markets and the vast majority of economists don’t expect any further interest rate increases from the Bank of England. The view held by most is that with the inflation rate expected to fall and economic growth weak, there is less need to continue to raise rates further. Financial markets, as of 23 April, were expecting between two and three quarter-point reductions in interest rates in 2024, taking rates from 5.25% down to 4.75% or 4.50%. A survey of economists by Bloomberg, the financial news and data provider, in mid-April found that most expected the first rate cut in June, with rates cut to 4.25% by year end.
- 8.3. Continued high rates have led to higher borrowing costs for households, notably mortgage interest rates which rose sharply from the very low rates seen previously. Around 1.6 million households whose fixed rate mortgages end in 2024 face higher mortgage costs, although the likelihood that the Bank of England had completed its cycle of interest rate increases led leading banks to offer lower mortgage rates. Since February 2024, some mortgage providers started to raise the interest rates on their fixed-rate mortgages, reflecting that fact that financial markets are not expecting as many rate reductions from the Bank of England in 2024 as previously thought. At the end of March 2024, the average interest rate on a two-year fixed rate mortgage was 4.97% and for a five-year fixed rate mortgage it was 4.53%.



Source: Monthly data to March 2024, Bank of England, [Quoted household interest rates](#) (accessed 22 April 2024), at 75% LTV

- 8.4. The impact of the increase in interest rates is reflected in measures of mortgage affordability. The share of borrower income taken up by principal and interest payments for new mortgages had reached a low in 2020 due to the fall in interest rates in response to the Covid pandemic. However, since then there has been a significant increase in mortgage payments as a share of income due to interest rate rises. From a low of 15.7% in Q3 2020, for home movers the share has increased to 18.7% in Q4 2023, while for first-time buyers the share has increased from a low of 15.3% in Q2 2020 to 20.5% in Q4 2023.

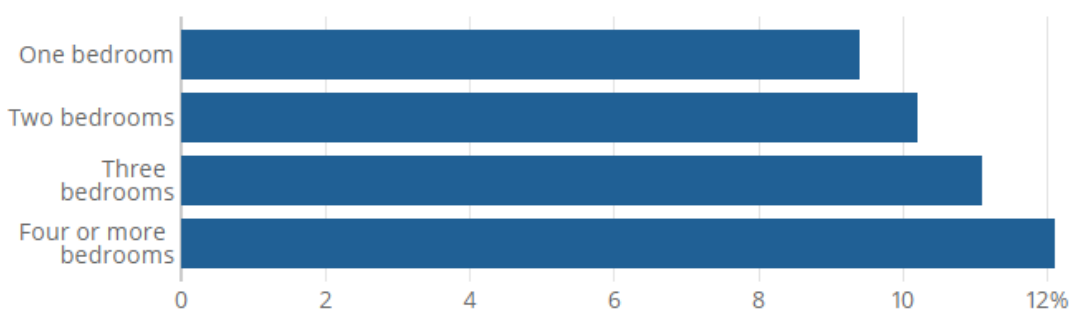
9. Housing costs

Rental Costs

- 9.1. According to the ONS, private rental prices in the UK increased by 9.2% over the year to March 2024 (this is a provisional estimate). This is the highest increase recorded in the ONS' series, which goes back to January 2015. The ONS now publishes a monthly Private Index of Private Rents (PIPR) which measures how private rents have changed for new and existing tenants in the UK.
- 9.2. According to the PIRP, in Scotland the rate rose at a higher level than the UK, second only to London, at 10.5%, with the average private rent in Scotland now £947 per month. In Renfrewshire Private rent prices rose to an average of £742 in March 2024, an annual increase of 10.9% from £669 in March 2023 and £73 more per month.

Change in average rents by bedroom number in Renfrewshire/Inverclyde

Monthly private rental price, annual inflation, March 2024



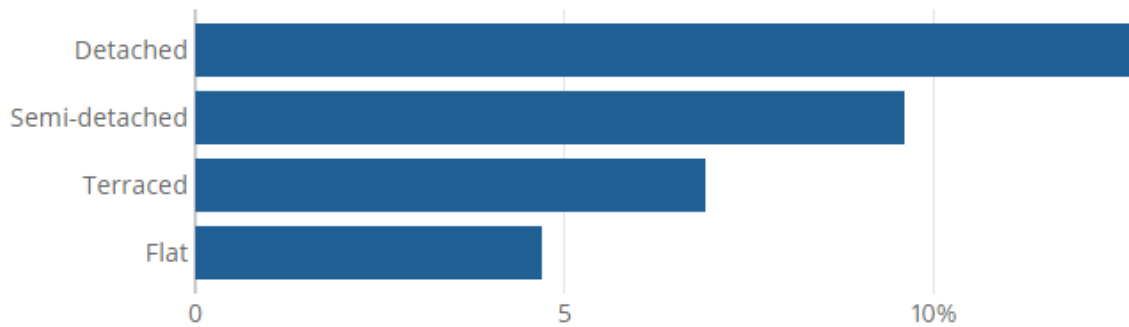
Source: Price Index of Private Rents from the Office for National Statistics

Home owners

- 9.3. For those buying a home, ONS figures indicate the average price paid by first-time buyers was £127,000 in February 2024 (provisional). This was 6.3% higher than the average of £120,000 in February 2023. The average house price was £157,000 up 7.3% from February 2023 where the average price was £146,000. This was higher than the rise in Scotland (5.6%) over the same period.
- 9.4. For homes bought with a mortgage, the average house price was £168,000 in February 2024 (provisional). This was 8.2% higher than the average of £155,000 in February 2023. The increase is dependant on house type, with the average price for detached houses rising 12.7%, while the average price for flats rose by 4.7%.

Change in house price by type of property in Renfrewshire

Provisional figure for 12-month change in house price, by property type, February 2024



Source: Registers of Scotland and UK House Price Index from HM Land Registry

Tenant Protection

- 9.5. The Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 came into force in October 2022 as an emergency temporary response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The legislation when introduced, implemented a rent cap for private, social and student rented accommodation effectively freezing rents, and provided protection against eviction. The protection provided by this legislation ended on 30 March 2024.
- 9.6. This means landlords will once again have the authority to enforce eviction orders that were previously placed on hold for a period of up to six months under the Act. There were some exceptions to the ban depending on the reason that the eviction order was sought, including some new temporary 'hardship' grounds which were also introduced under the Act. Landlords who have obtained an order for eviction during this period but have not yet been able to enforce it due to the ban, this can be enforced by Sheriff Officers on or after 1st April, even if the order was obtained less than 6 months ago. Notices served during this period will remain valid, and pending eviction applications will be processed as usual by the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland.
- 9.7. From 1st April 2024, the rent cap brought in under the legislation will also be lifted. This means landlords will have more flexibility in setting rental rates for their properties. However, this is not an end to restrictions on rent increases altogether. As reported to the last Sub-Committee, instead of a fixed cap on rent hikes, a new transition process will be introduced with the aim of achieving fairness and transparency for both landlords and tenants.
- 9.8. It is too early to say what effect the ending of the temporary legislation has had on tenancies in Renfrewshire. The main issue emerging in housing is that there has been a 10% increase in homeless application compared to last year. Local trends do not currently show the expected number of homeless applications from the private rented sector but anticipate this will begin to emerge now that the eviction ban is lifted.

10. Fuel – Energy Costs for Households

- 10.1. Every three months, Ofgem reviews and sets a level on how much an energy supplier can charge for each unit of energy. This is known as the price cap. From 1 April to 30 June 2024, the price cap fell 12.3%. Therefore, an average household on typical usage, paying by Direct Debit for dual fuel is paying £1,690 a year, down £238 from the previous cap. Between 1 July to 30 September 2024, the energy price cap is set at £1,568 per year for a typical household who use electricity and gas and pay by Direct Debit. The current predictions from Cornwall Insight are that the typical bill will rise to £1,762 from October and remain at this level until the end of March.
- 10.2. Recent high costs of energy, as well as high costs of living more generally, have affected families with low incomes, with debt more common on priority bills. According to the Resolution Foundation, in October 2023, roughly one-in-eight families (12 per cent) in the bottom fifth by income owed money on priority bills like utilities and Council Tax, nearly three times the proportion of families in the top two-fifths (4 per cent). Ofgem data indicates that the number of accounts behind on their gas and electricity bills has reached the highest level since records began in 2012.
- 10.3. On top of this growing number of households falling into energy-bill debt, the size of the problem for those who find themselves in debt is getting worse. The most recent quarter of data revealed that the average amount owed by those in arrears on their gas or electricity bill has increased by half in a little over a year (up or 51 per cent between Q2 2022 and Q3 2023). This is changing the nature of financial hardship for many of the most vulnerable families. Data from Citizens Advice reveals that, compared to before the pandemic, the average person seeking debt advice today has, on average, over £500 (£539) more debt on priority bills like energy, rent arrears and Council Tax.
- 10.4. In November 2023, Consumer Scotland found that 30% of households in Scotland were finding it difficult to keep up with their bills, equivalent to around 750,000 households. This is a slight reduction from the previous year's figures which were 35%. Although the Price Cap has reduced, energy bills are still more than 50% higher than before the cost of living crisis, with the January to March price cap 59% higher.
- 10.5. Some groups are particularly likely to face affordability challenges including disabled people, those with long-term health conditions, those with low income, and those living off the gas grid. Other key findings from the Consumer Scotland autumn 2023 tracker include:
- Almost one fifth (19%) of households have borrowed money or missed rent or mortgage payments in the last six months as a result of the high cost of energy
 - Nearly one third of households are cutting back on food shopping to afford their energy bills
 - One third (34%) of respondents say energy bills are negatively affecting their mental health either 'a lot' or 'a fair amount'

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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Cost of Living Dashboard

May 2024

Prepared by:

Policy and Partnerships

tacklingpoverty@renfrewshire.gov.uk

Cost of Living Dashboard

This dashboard has been developed to provide a summary of key indicators relating to how local households might be impacted by the cost-of-living crisis

It has four key sections: economy, social security, financial insecurity and housing

Each section has an overview with key indicators and their movement from the last period, supported by additional information and graphs showing further analysis and longer-term trends

The dashboard is still in development, and feedback is welcome on the information included and its presentation to ensure it is a useful tool

OVERVIEW

Key statistics - economy

 **5.25 %**

Bank of England base rate
(March 2024)

 **£18.33**

Average hourly pay for a
Renfrewshire worker (excluding
overtime) (Scotland / £18.09)

 **2.3 %**


Consumer Prices Index (CPI)
(April 2024)

 **149.54p**

Average fuel price for petrol
(May 2024)

 **3.2%**

Inflation rate for food and non-
alcoholic beverages
(March 2024)

 **£1,690**

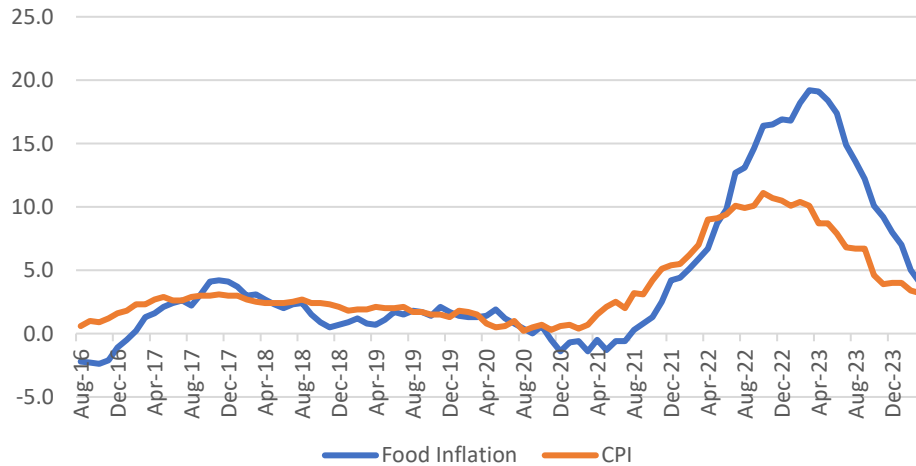
Energy price cap, typical use,
direct debit
(from April 2024)

- Inflation falling, driven by decreases in food inflation
- No change in interest rates
- Energy price cap falling, for the first-time prepayment meters comparatively cheaper than direct debit
- Hourly pay increasing, slightly ahead of Scotland average

Inflation

The inflation rate in April 2024 is 2.3%, down from 3.2% in March. The reduction is not consistent across all categories, and is driven by reductions in energy prices. The fall was not as great as expected, largely attributed to service sector inflation.

CPI Inflation Percentages

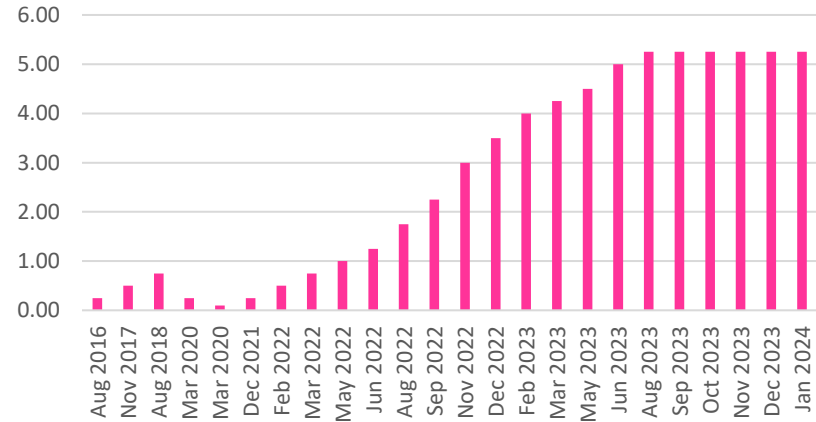


Interest Rates

The Bank of England's base rate is currently 5.25%, having increased significantly over the last year.

Interest rate projections are difficult to predict, however many analysts are predicting modest decreases over the next two years.

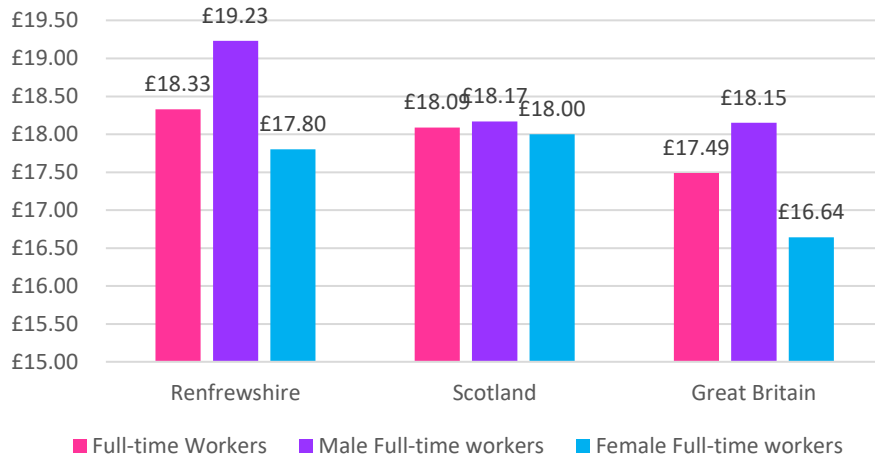
Bank of England Bank Interest Rate



Earnings

Based on the ONS annual survey of hours and earnings, in 2023 the median hourly pay (excluding overtime) for workers in Renfrewshire is higher compared to that for workers in Scotland, or the rest of Great Britain.

It should be noted that the median hourly wage for females in Renfrewshire is less than that for workers in Scotland. The gender pay gap has been declining slowly over time.



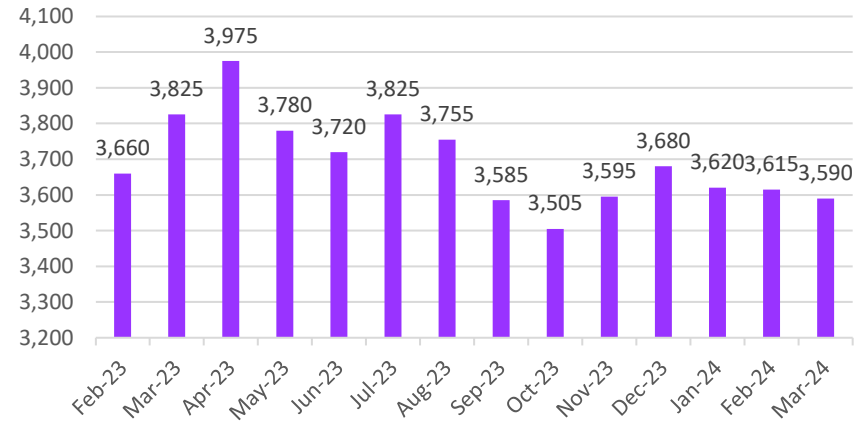
Employment Rate

The ONS Labour Force Survey shows the Claimant Count for those claiming benefits 'principally for the reason of being unemployed', which now stands at 3,590. This is based on numbers claiming JSA and Universal Credit.

These numbers are based on those aged 16 and over.

The Renfrewshire unemployment rate of 3.1% is the same as Scotland (3.1%) but lower than that of Great Britain (3.9%).

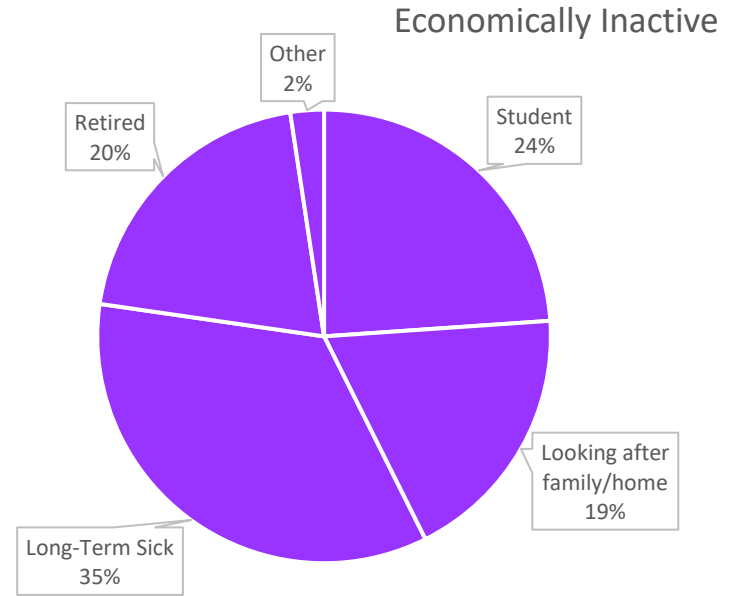
Claimant Count



Economic Inactivity

The ONS Labour Force Survey also provides details on those aged 16+ that are economically inactive and not seeking work. Between January 2023 to December 2023, of the 25,100 people aged 16-64 that are classed as economically inactive, 80% are not looking for employment (either in the long-term or short/medium term).

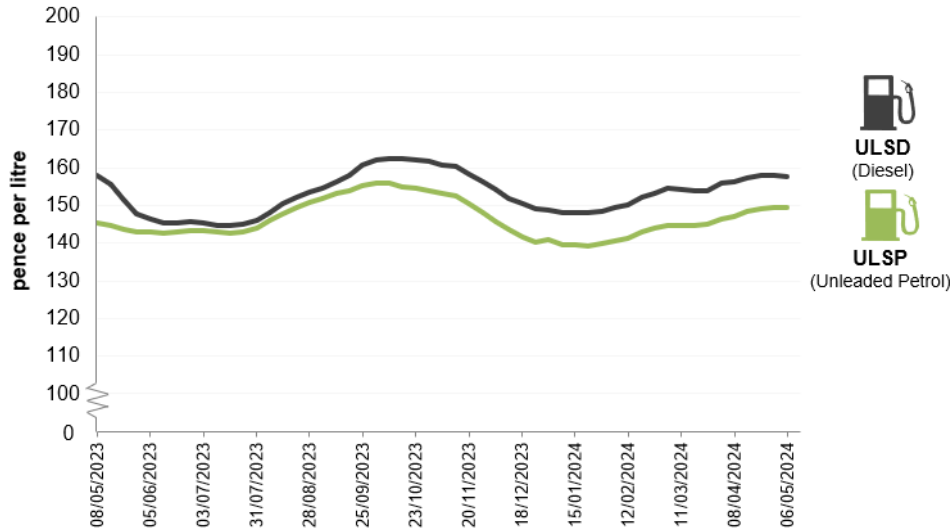
The percentage of economically inactive people aged 16-64 that want to gain employment (either in long-term or short/medium term) in Renfrewshire (20%) is significantly higher than that of the rates in Scotland (16.5%) and Great Britain (17.6%).



Fuel Prices

From the UK Government's weekly fuel price publication, the average UK pump price on 6 May 2024 is 149.54 pence per litre for petrol, and 157.64 pence per litre for diesel.

Weekly road fuel prices over the 12 months to 6 May 2024

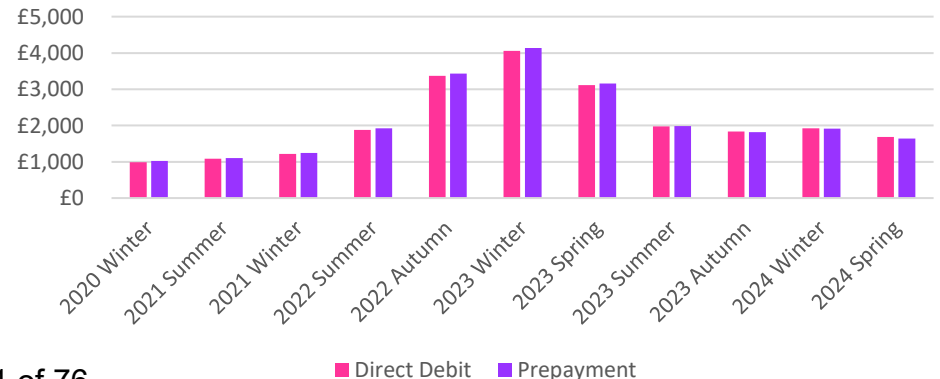


Energy Price Cap

The Energy Price Cap sets a limit on the maximum amount suppliers can charge for each unit of gas and electricity used and sets a maximum daily standing charge. That means there is no upper limit to what a user pays, if more energy is used, more is paid.

The Energy Price Cap now changes every three months (previously six), mainly based on average energy wholesale prices in the months leading up to each change. From April 2024 the Energy Price Cap will reduce to £1,690 per year for those on a monthly direct debit, and to £1,643 per year for those with a prepayment meter.

It should be noted that between October 2022 and June 2023, no one paid the full amount under the Price Cap. Due to high energy prices the UK Government introduced the Energy Price Guarantee which provided a discount on the Price Cap for households.



OVERVIEW

Key statistics - social security

 **15,479**

Households claiming Universal Credit
(Provisional February 2024)

 **5,858**

Children awarded a Clothing Grant
(April 2024)

 **10,670**

Children in Renfrewshire receiving a Scottish Child Payment
(December 2023)

 **4,759**

Children in receipt of Free School Meals
(April 2024)

- Households claiming Universal Credit increasing, this includes new cases and managed migration from tax credits
- Increase in number of children receiving Scottish Child Payment, largely positive as this is a relatively new benefit

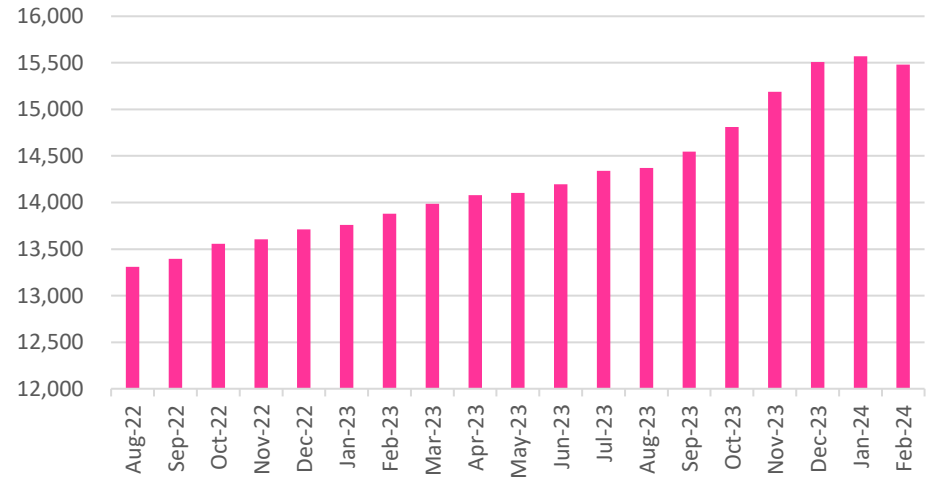
Universal Credit

Households on Universal Credit (UC) continue to rise with 15,177 households in Renfrewshire receiving Universal Credit as of February 2024.

Starting in August 2023, the managed migration from tax credits to UC will see further rises in the UC caseload, with the legacy tax credit caseload closing this year. From April 2024, the managed migration process will commence for those claimants still on Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance.

Following the UK Spring Budget announcements, from June 2023 the maximum levels of childcare costs paid by Universal Credit has increased, with childcare costs paid at a higher level within UC compared to tax credits. The DWP have been publicising that some people may be better off on UC compared to tax credits, which may be driving some of the increase in UC numbers.

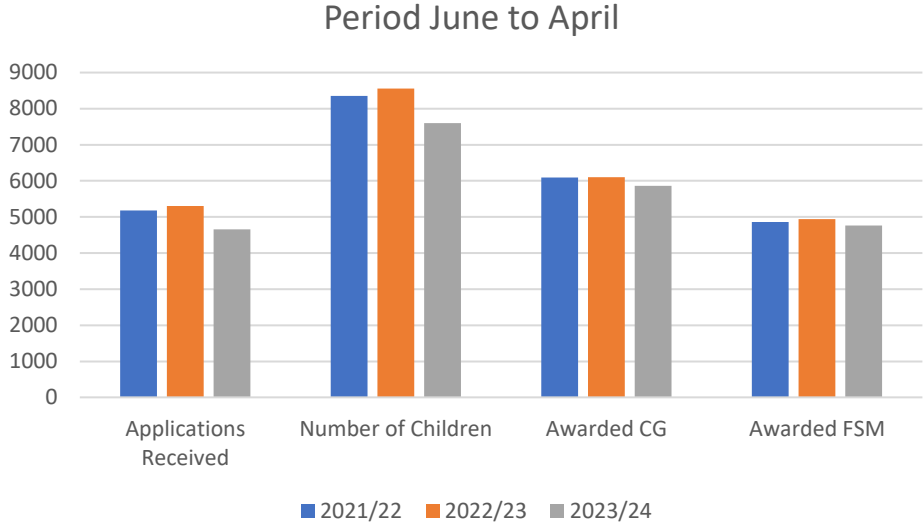
Number of Households on UC



Free School Meals and Clothing Grants

The 2023/24 Free School Meals and Clothing Grant application process commenced in June 2023 and closed in April 2024.

The number of applications received during 2023/24 is down compared to the same period in 2022/23.



OVERVIEW


Key statistics - financial insecurity

 **6,484**


Number of Crisis Grants awarded -
spend of £753,268)
(April 23 - March 24)

 **3,011**

Number of people who sought
advice from Advice Works or
Citizens Advice Bureau
(2023/24, Q4)

 **1,368**

Foodbank vouchers issued
(includes 759 children and 1,771
adults)
2023/34, Q4

 **£740,768**

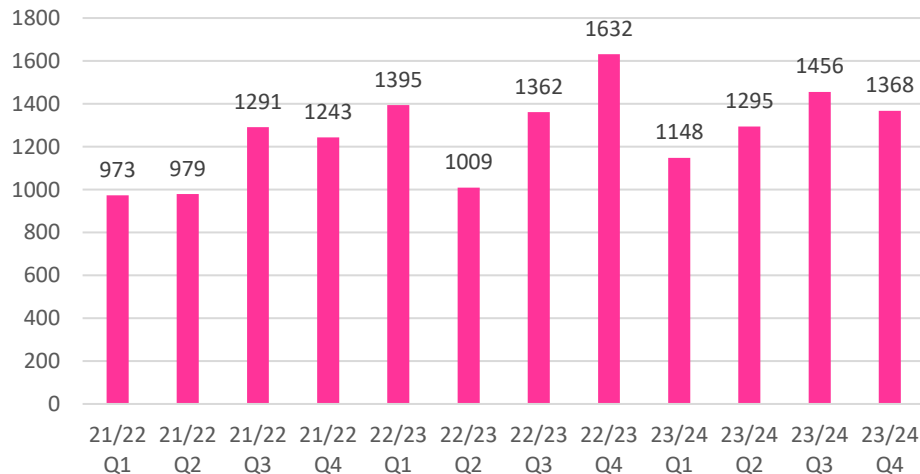
New case debt under management
between Advice Works and Citizens
Advice Bureau (2023/24 Q4)

- Foodbank demand rising compared to last period and same period last year
- Number of people approaching local advice agencies down this period, but wider trend is upward

Foodbank Vouchers

Foodbank vouchers issued in Q4 2023/24 (1,368) assisted 759 children and 1,771 adults.

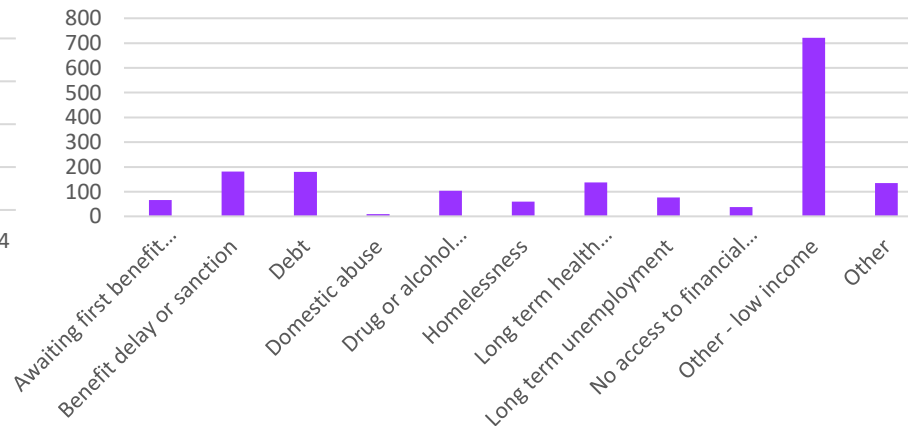
Foodbank Vouchers Issued by Quarter



More than 3 vouchers needed in the last 6 months

In terms of more than 3 vouchers needed in the last 6 months, there has been a steady increase in the number awarded due to a Benefit delay or sanction. This will be monitored going forward, due to an increase in the sanction regime being implemented within Universal Credit.

Reasons for needing more than 3 vouchers in the last 6 months - 2023/24

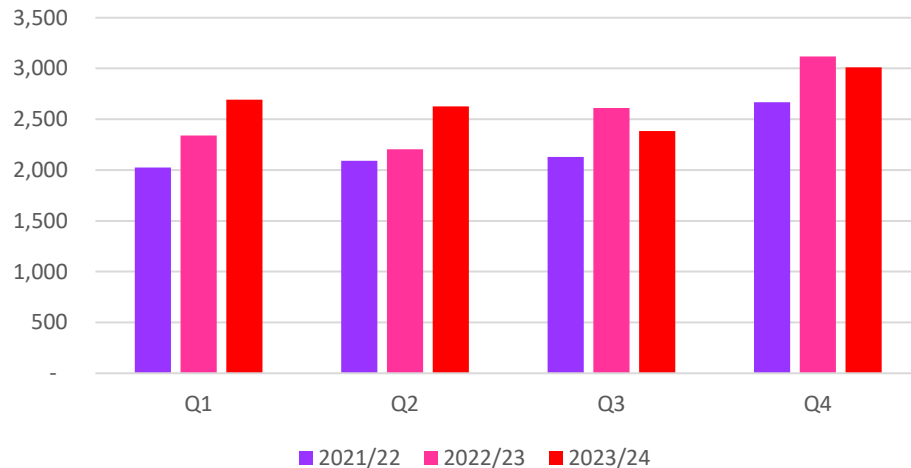


Advice

Advice Works and Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (RCAB) are supporting a high level of new clients. The number of clients who received appointment support during 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 showed a 7.8% increase. N.B. These figures do not include the number of calls/emails from people looking for signposting information.

Combined, there was a client financial gain of over £12m from advice provided by Advice Works and RCAB in 2023/24.

Combined RCAB and Advice Works New Clients

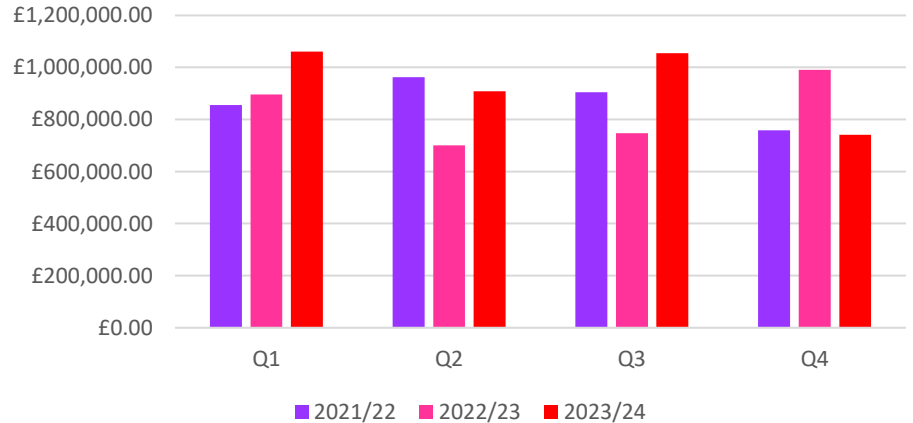


Debt Under Management

Advice Works and Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau continue to deal with a high level of enquiries regarding debt.

The combined level of new debt cases under management is shown below, by quarter over the last 3 years.

By comparing the debt under management during 2023/24 compared to 2022/23, there is a 30% increase. Whilst it might be too early to make a definitive statement, the higher levels may reflect the recent increases in interest rates, making debt repayments unaffordable without advice and support.



Scottish Welfare Fund

There have been 9,722 applications for Crisis Grants between April 2023 and March 2024 with £753,268 awarded. This is an average award rate of 67%.

Nationwide, the main reasons for a CG not being awarded are “reasons for application do not meet the conditions of award” and “excluded as a result of previous applications”. Generally, awards are restricted to 3 within a 12-month rolling period however discretion can be used. In Renfrewshire, discretion is frequently exercised. Cost-of-living pressures will for many households result in immediate financial crises more often with less flexibility to manage budgets.

Nationwide 52% of Crisis Grant awards are made to single persons, with 22% made to single parents. This suggests single people and single parents, who rely on one income within the household, are financially struggling in terms of income and disproportionately by expenditure due to housing, energy, fuel, and food costs.

Crisis Grant Applications by month



OVERVIEW

Key statistics - housing

 **4,678**

Number of applicants on the housing list
(Six-month point, 2023/24)

 **15,672**

Households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction
(May 2024)

 **274**

Number of new Homeless Cases
(2023/24, Q4)

 **2,740**

Number of tenants in rent arrears
(April 2024)

- New homeless cases marginally down this period, but wider trend is upward.
- Significant increase in people presenting who were either in private tenancies or living in parental/relative homes.
- Fewer tenants in rent arrears this period, although an increase compared to same period last year.

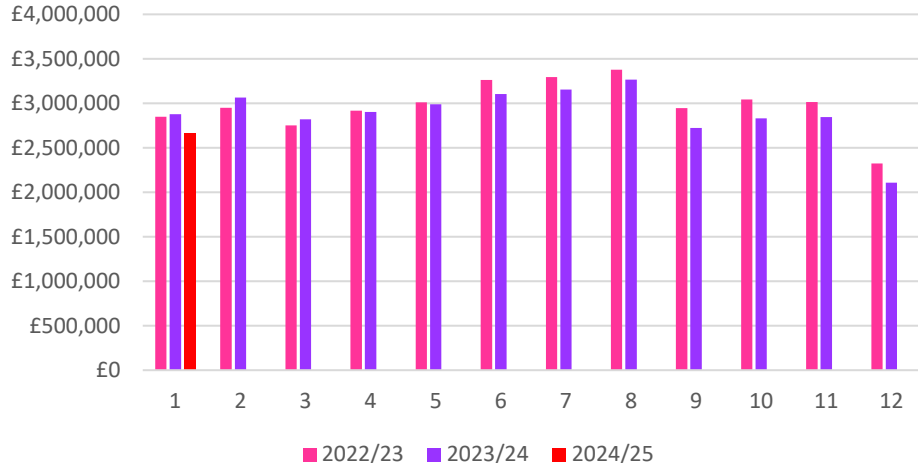
Council Tenants in arrears

As at the end of March 2024, 2,740 current tenants were in rent arrears totaling £2,109,169. This figure includes all levels of arrears some of which are caused by Universal Credit payment processes. Staff within Housing Services continue to work with tenants to address rent arrears and provide advice/signpost tenants to Support Services and Agencies where financial difficulties are identified.

For the period October 2023 – March 2024, 161 tenants have qualified for Tenant Support Fund assistance with circa £32k awarded.

Renfrewshire Council tenancy rents increased by 6% this year.

Current Tenant Arrears

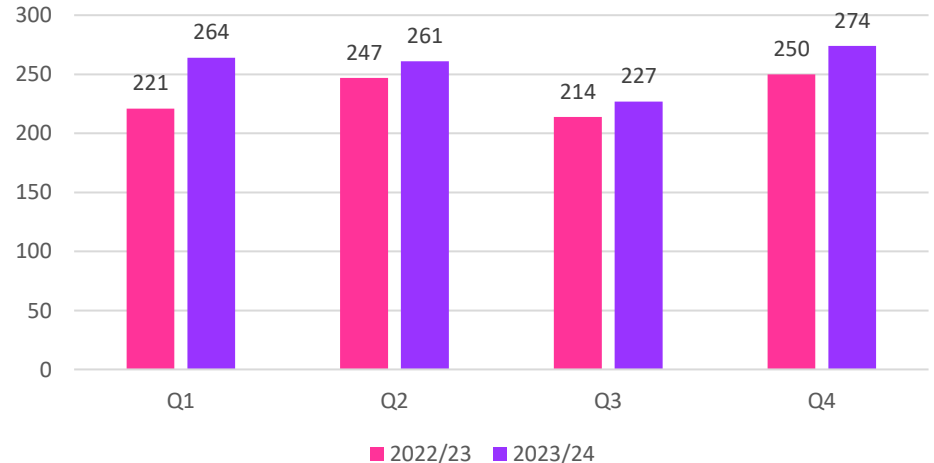


Homeless Cases

The Housing and Homeless Advice Service had 274 new cases within Q4 in 2023/24 compared to 250 for the same period in 2022/23.

There has been a 10% increase in homeless applications this year compared to last year. The largest increases in reasons given are being asked to leave, disputes/breakdown in relationship or other action taken by the landlord resulting in the termination of the tenancy.

New Homeless Cases



Average Monthly Rent Costs

From the Scottish Government's Private Sector Rent Statistics publication dated November 2023, figures show average rent changes. These statistics are based predominantly on advertised rents, and so do not represent rent changes for existing tenants.

Ren - Average Monthly Rent	2010	2021	2022	2023
1 bedroom shared	£296	£332	£370	£416
1 bedroom	£374	£392	£425	£463
2 bedroom	£473	£518	£547	£638
3 bedroom	£612	£642	£693	£756
4 bedroom	£834	£1,238	£1,306	£1,424

LHA rates are the maximum amount that can be paid for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Housing Costs) for those renting from a private landlord. Any shortfall between charged rent and the amount of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit Housing Costs awarded would have to be made up by the tenant, although Discretionary Housing Payments can be awarded to provide support.

Renfrewshire Monthly LHA Rates	Current LHA Rate	April 2024 LHA Rate
1 Bedroom Shared	£294	£360
1 Bedroom	£350	£400
2 Bedroom	£450	£525
3 Bedroom	£550	£600
4 Bedroom	£1,000	£1,100

Rent Affordability

Average monthly rent for all types of properties have increased between 2021 and 2023. Although 4-bedroom properties showed almost the lowest increase between 2021 and 2023, they have seen the biggest increases since 2010 with a 70.7% increase during this period.

% Increase in Average Renfrewshire Monthly Rents by Property Size					
Period	1 Bedroom Shared	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	4 Bedroom
Increase between 2022 and 2023	12.43	8.94	16.64	9.09	9.04
Increase between 2010 and 2023	40.54	23.8	34.88	23.53	70.74



To: Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

On: 5 June 2024

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Update

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Council and partners have a key focus on tackling inequality and improving wellbeing and have longstanding programmes of work and partnership arrangements in place such as the Tackling Poverty Programme and the change programme established in response to the findings of the Renfrewshire Drug and Alcohol Commission.
- 1.2. At Council on 2 March 2023 members reaffirmed their commitment to the Fairer Renfrewshire programme and outlined a number of investments including bringing together the current Fairer Renfrewshire funding alongside the Tackling Poverty and Social Renewal reserve funds into a single resource.
- 1.3. Leadership Board approved the wider Fairer Renfrewshire Programme for 2024/25 in April 2024. This programme includes the commitments made as part of the Council's budget meeting in February 2024, as well as funding commitments to sustain funding for a range of key projects delivered under the Fairer Renfrewshire programme.
- 1.4. Work on priorities has continued with this paper containing updates on a number of key priorities at Section 4, as well as the overview of proposals and priorities for 2024 at Section 5.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Background

- 3.1 As highlighted in Section 1, the Fairer Renfrewshire Programme brings together a number of existing programmes of work focussed on achieving fairness and equity, including the former Tackling Poverty Programme and Alcohol and Drugs Change Programme. These programmes are

being brought together alongside the Council's Social Renewal Plan, mapping a fairer future for Renfrewshire's residents through the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

- 3.2. There are four key emerging themes which are shared across all elements of the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, and these are:
- Improving financial security
 - Advancing equality of opportunity
 - Building community capacity and resilience
 - Listening to lived experience
- 3.3 Section 4 of this report provides an update on projects for information, whilst section 5 of the paper provides an overview of proposals and priorities within the Fairer Renfrewshire programme for 2024/25.

4. Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Updates

Scottish Government Council Tax Debt Pilot Project

- 4.1 As previously reported, in November 2023, Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (RCAB) approached the Council to collaborate in a Council Tax Debt Pilot funded through the Scottish Government. The pilot focuses on exploring how local Citizens Advice Bureau and local authorities can work together to improve the journey of those who are in council tax arrears or struggling to make council tax payment. The aim is to provide better outcomes for people and for local authorities and Renfrewshire is one of three Council areas involved.
- 4.2 The Pilot ran to the end of March 2024, however due to the very short period of the Pilot, allowing for only limited outcomes, the Council and RCAB have agreed to continue to collaborate over the next year to develop supports and better information about these supports for those struggling to pay Council Tax, as well as working to encourage those who can pay to do so timeously and those who are not liable for Council Tax to claim their reductions or exemptions.
- 4.3 The Fairer Renfrewshire Panel were consulted as part of the Pilot, and provided feedback in a number of areas, including the current processes for billing and payment, barriers to paying Council Tax, communications, including better letters, and supports for those struggling to pay. Feedback was provided to the Corporate Communications Team, who have indicated they will work with the Panel prior to Council Tax bills for 24/25 being issued. The first tangible outcome from the Pilot has been the development of a leaflet by RCAB giving details of where to get advice on different aspects of Council Tax and outlining supports around payment.
- 4.4 Regular meetings have commenced between relevant Council Officers and RCAB staff, and while the outcomes of the initial pilot will be provided through an evaluation report which will collate the learnings and achieved outcomes from all three funded local authority areas, Renfrewshire will consider these as part of the ongoing project.

School Support Service

- 4.5 As previously reported, the School Support service provided by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau commenced at the start of the school year, with the first appointments week commencing 23 August 2023. From that date until the end of March 24 there had been 129 advice appointments/contacts made, and advice provided to 83 individuals and Client Financial Gain of £26,417. It is anticipated that anticipate this amount will increase over the next couple of months as clients who have been assisted in making claims receive outcomes.
- 4.6 A meeting was arranged with Education staff in March to look at how the service is working in general and Education managers were informed about the schools where take up of the service was low. It was agreed that further promotion of the service would be targeted at those schools and a further meeting arranged to discuss results.
- 4.7 That meeting took place in April, and RCAB advised that numbers had increased in those low-uptake schools, with numbers more consistent across all schools. Work is ongoing to increase numbers using the service, including the promotion of the service to the families of P7 pupils transitioning to secondary school, with the service promoted to Head Teachers of P7 pupils in the Children's Services weekly update on 6 May and RCAB attending Head Teachers meetings. In addition, the new school meal debt processes, with a focus on supporting families, should increase referrals to the service.

Lived Experience Panel

- 4.8 The Fairer Renfrewshire Lived Experience Panel continue to work alongside Council officers from a range of services to provide important feedback on the development and delivery of services.
- 4.9 March's Panel was used to discuss Council Tax and the Council Tax Pilot, while the Panel met with the Convener and Depute of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee late in March to discuss Panel priorities and explore opportunities for the Panel and Sub-Committee to work more closely. In April the panel discussed the plans for Summer of Fun, providing feedback on proposed guidance for the grants programme and communication of the summer programme.
- 4.10 Looking ahead the Panel will attend St James School in Renfrew in May to sample school meals and find out more about the recipes and regulations concerning school meals, further to previous discussions focussed on school meal debt. In June, the Events Team will attend to discuss how events organised by the Council can be made more inclusive, again returning following previous discussions held in 2023.
- 4.11 It is positive to see Council services developing ongoing relationships with the Panel, and the wide range of Council services keen to engage the Panel's experience and expertise to influence and improve their work. Work is underway to finalise contract arrangements to support this work for 2024-25, recognising the value of the Panel's work. A sharing event is planned for June 2024, where members of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee, officers from the Fairer Renfrewshire Officer Group and the Lived Experience Panel will come together the share the learning and impact of the work over the last year, and explore opportunities to work together in the future.

Community Needs Assessment in Gallowhill

- 4.12 Late in 2023, Renfrewshire HSCP was successful in a funding bid to NHS GGC Public Health to carry out a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) in Gallowhill, recognising the increase in Child Poverty rates in the Gallowhill and Renfrew South Ward. The commissioning process for an organisation to carry out the CNA has ended, and Active Communities have been appointed to deliver this piece of work.
- 4.13 Work is ongoing to develop the CNA, with an initial Steering Group meeting taking place in late May. The CNA itself will take 6 months, and the Sub-Committee will be kept updated with progress.
- 4.14 A partnership session took place on 21 March 2024, bringing together services from across the Council and key partners such as the HSCP, One Ren, and Engage Renfrewshire focussed on exploring and planning a place-based, partnership response to challenges around rapidly growing child poverty in the Gallowhill area. The session was focussed on sharing knowledge and insight, and starting to identify potential actions where we can develop our understanding, target resources and work collaboratively moving forward.
- 4.15 This work will be ongoing however early actions are:
- Invest in Renfrewshire commencing employability outreach in Gallowhill Community Centre.
 - Digital champions attending the Community Centre to support digital inclusion.

Easter holiday provision

- 4.16 A focussed programme of holiday activities for children and young people took place throughout the Easter break using residual funding identified from previous holiday provision. Camps were provided across six locations by Community Learning and Development staff and Street Stuff for children and young people aged 5-14. The camps were free and with a meal provided at lunch time. Information and booking for the camps was shared with key third sector organisations and also on a referral basis from Social Work in order to ensure effective targeting of places to children that need it most.
- 4.17 531 children and young people attended and information gathered at booking has shown that the camps did reach child poverty priority groups, especially lone parent families and families where someone in the household has a disability. Ages of children attending ranged from 5 -14, although fewer 12, 13 and 14 year olds took part and the greatest percentage of children fell within the age bracket 6 to 8 years old, these ages accounting for more than half (54.9%) of all ages attending.
- 4.18 Gallowhill Primary School had the highest number of registered pupils, with 51 (or 9.6%) of the overall total of children registered. Next was Kirklandneuk PS with 40 children (7.5%), followed by Woodlands PS with 33 children (6.2%).
- 4.19 The camps were well received, with comments from parents and carers such as *'Camps are very expensive and can be more than what I even make in a days wage. There's a lot of hardship in our*

area and this gives the kids an outlet for extra curricular activities’ and ‘I am a kinship carer and my grandson has ADHD and ASD it gets him out socialising and allows me to go to work without worry as I know he enjoys his time at the club it’s a fantastic service.’

Thrive under 5

- 4.20 The Thrive under 5 programme launches on 22 May at Station 7 in Johnstone with an event chaired by IJB Chair Cllr Jennifer Adam. The initial pilot will be delivered by Active Communities with support from Renfrewshire HSCP Health Improvement team and robust referral pathways will be developed to ensure the programme reaches families who may benefit most. The event will provide information on Thrive under 5 and how local organisations and practitioners that are supporting families with pre-5 children from Johnstone can refer families into the programme.
- 4.21 Key elements of the programme will include money and debt advice in partnership with RCAB, provision of fruit and vegetables, free pantry membership and shops, fuel support, cooking classes, provision of cooking equipment and physical activity opportunities.
- 4.22 The steering group set up by Renfrewshire HSCP and including Council Officers from several services, including Advice Works and One Ren as well as third sector partners will support, monitor and evaluate the programme. Further roll out of Thrive under 5 is dependent on the allocation of further funding.

5. Fairer Renfrewshire Programme – 24/25

- 5.1 At Council on 29th February 2024, members further reaffirmed their commitment to the Fairer Renfrewshire programme with further investments in a number of targeted interventions including:
- additional welfare rights funding, delivered by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau
 - a targeted programme of summer activities for children and young people from low income families, working across Council services with community groups and third sector organisations across Renfrewshire to ensure that our most vulnerable families are able to access a range of activities and healthy food over the summer period
 - additional resource to explore inequalities experienced by older people, delivered by ROAR
 - strengthened engagement with young people, including the targeting of activities to support our most vulnerable children and young people in Renfrewshire through the development of a youth-led programme
 - a further winter school clothing payment in 2024, providing £50 per child eligible for the School Clothing Grant
 - continued delivery of the Dolly Parton Imagination library programme, for all children aged between 2-5
 - continued deliver of the Who Cares Scotland Communities that Care programme within Renfrewshire’s educational establishments, continuing the Council’s support for the care experienced community

- 5.2 The commitments within the Council’s budget were funded by an additional £700,000 allocated in addition to the £5m original funding identified when the Fairer Renfrewshire programme was established.
- 5.3 In addition to these commitments within the Council’s budget, further proposals have now been developed for a 24/25 programme which will be funded from the original Fairer Renfrewshire programme funding. These relate to previously supported Tackling Poverty funded initiatives as well as new and emerging priorities, and combined with the 2024 budget announcements will form the 2024 programme for Fairer Renfrewshire.
- 5.4 These funding proposals total an additional £0.516m to be allocated from Fairer Renfrewshire funding and include:
- £40k to sustain support to the Council’s Energy Management Unit, helping people who need support to reduce their energy bills, manage fuel debt and improve the energy efficiency in their homes. Fairer Renfrewshire currently funds one energy advocate within the team.
 - £75k to deliver another Winter Connections programme in 24/25, co-producing a programme of activities hosted by local groups that support people to connect to others within their community over the winter period.
 - £138k to continue providing the free universal breakfast service in nine primary schools. The project relieves financial pressure on low-income families, but most importantly, makes sure that children start the school day ready to learn.
 - £75k to continue the Cost of the School Day fund, operating 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.
 - £70k to continue to deliver the Peer Health education project 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.
 - £78k to continue to provide the Skoobmobile, providing a mobile public library service directly to children and families in communities. The programme continues to support the delivery of the Skoobmobile which introduces children to the benefit of reading and play and supports the Council’s ambitions to narrow the literacy attainment gap.
 - £40k to continue to develop models of participation for people with lived experience of poverty to inform the Council’s policy and practice.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 Officers continue to work with partners to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. Priority actions over the next quarter include:
- Evaluation of Winter Connections 23/24
 - Development of the Local Child Poverty Action Report

- Developing and delivering budget investments, particularly the design and delivery of the summer holiday programme
- Development of equalities workstream as detailed in February 2024 Leadership Board
- Launch of Renfrewshire Community Survey 2024

Implications of the Report

1. Financial – There are no financial implications associated with this report.
2. HR & Organisational Development – none
3. Community/Council Planning – The Fairer Renfrewshire Programme is a key driver in achieving the ‘Fair’ strategic outcome and theme within the Council Plan, and covers a number of the key actions identified in the plan. It also represents a significant partnership programme of work which supports the ‘Fair’ theme within the Community Plan, with dedicated partnership governance being established to ensure alignment between these areas of work.
4. Legal - none
5. Property/Assets - none
6. Information Technology - none
7. Equality and Human Rights – Equality and human rights are a key pillar of this plan, and it is anticipated that the programme will likely advance equality of opportunity.
8. Health and Safety - none
9. Procurement – none
10. Risk – none
11. Privacy Impact – none
12. COSLA Policy Position – none
13. Climate Risk – none

Author: Laura McIntyre, Head of Policy and Partnerships



To: Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

On: 5th June 2024

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Winter Connections Evaluation

1. Summary

- 1.1. 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 throughout winter.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. Following a successful first year and a positive evaluation of the Winter Connections Programme in 2022/23, £75,000 of funding was allocated from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the delivery of a second year of Winter Connections in 23/24. An additional £10,000 was allocated from the Recovery Change Fund.
- 1.4. An evaluation has now been carried out on the 23/24 programme, and the key messages of the evaluation include:
 - Once again, 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.
 - The social aspect of bringing people together created a sense of belonging and provided a supportive environment and peer support, which was especially important for people who were feeling isolated.
 - Activities provided opportunities to reduce stress, learn new skills, increase confidence and be creative.

- Over twice as many people as last year benefited from the programme, demonstrating a continued need for access to free activities and food for individuals and families who are continuing to experience financial hardship.
- Providing free food alongside activities ensured that the programme contributed to tackling food poverty in a discreet and dignified manner.
- Benefits of the programme included connecting people with each other, reducing social isolation, providing fun activities, and encouraging new people to engage with services. It also helped to create a sense of belonging to the local community, provide the opportunity to learn something new, reduce financial costs and help people to learn about a new service in their local area.
- The programme enabled organisations to enhance their services and engage with new people, thereby raising awareness of their venues and services.
- Providing hot drinks in libraries enabled visitors to stay for longer, encouraged connections with others and provided a community asset where people felt comfortable, regardless of the purpose of their visit.

1.5. In addition to the key messages, the evaluation report also provides a series of recommendations to be considered as part of any future programme. A copy of the full evaluation is attached at Appendix 1.

1.6. At Leadership Board in April 2024, £75,000 funding was agreed to run a Winter Connections programme in 2024/25.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that members of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee:

- Note the content of the report

3. Background

2.1. The development of the Winter Connections Programme has been a key focus for officers. £75,000 of funding was allocated from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the delivery of a second year of Winter Connections in 23/24. An additional £10,000 was allocated from the Recovery Change Fund.

2.2. The programme offers an extensive and varied programme of activities across Renfrewshire, hosted by community groups, typically between the months of November – March. Hosts are asked to sign up to Winter Connections principles, and support is provided to all host organisations including a Winter Connections toolkit, printed materials, information sharing, access to other services such as advice and provision of free period products.

2.3. Promotion of the programme and all linked activities is a key focus, with a partnership Winter Connections identity developed. Information on Winter Connections is available on the Council website, which includes a searchable map function. Activities are widely promoted through

social media, and printed materials have been widely distributed across all towns and villages across Renfrewshire.

2.4. The funding is now fully utilised for 23/4, and the programme has drawn to a close. A number of projects have secured alternative funding to continue their projects moving forward.

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 an evaluation of the Winter Connections programme. This is a key contributor to the Fair priority of the Council Plan, as well as being well aligned to the priority areas of the Community Plan relating to supporting low income families with children and reducing health inequalities.
4. **Legal** - none
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality and Human Rights** – The report provides an evaluation of the Winter Connections programme, which is considered to have a positive equalities impact in advancing equality of opportunity. Projects are monitored closely to understand the reach of a number of equality groups identified as priority groups, and an analysis of this reach is included within the evaluation document as well as reflections on how some groups may be better reached in further iterations of the programme.
8. **Health and Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none
13. **Climate Risk** – none

Author: Annabelle Armstrong-Walter, Strategic Partnerships and Inequalities Manager



Nature craft activity, Inchinnan

An evaluation of the Winter Connections Programme 2023/24

Through Winter Connections, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of community-driven initiatives. From fostering social connections to addressing food insecurity and providing opportunities for creative exploration, the programme has enriched the lives of local individuals and families.

RIG Arts

www.renfrewshire.gov.uk



Contents

1.	Executive Summary	3
2.	About Winter Connections.....	4
3.	Programme Delivery	7
4.	Impact of the Programme.....	17
5.	What did we learn?.....	28
6.	Conclusions and recommendations	31
7.	Appendix 1	32

1. Executive Summary

The Winter Connections programme was delivered for the first time between November 2022 and March 2023. The programme was delivered in partnership with local organisations and aimed to encourage people to connect and participate in activities in warm and welcoming spaces across communities in Renfrewshire.

Local community and voluntary organisations could apply for small grants of up to £2,000 to support with the additional costs of making venues, activities and sessions open as part of the programme. Items eligible for funding included equipment, food, energy costs, and rent.

The programme was very successful and as part of Renfrewshire Council's continued wider response to the cost-of-living crisis, between October 2023 and March 2024, £75,000 of funding was allocated from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the delivery of a second year of Winter Connections. An additional £10,000 was allocated from the Recovery Change Fund.

Key findings:

- Once again, 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.
- The social aspect of bringing people together created a sense of belonging and provided a supportive environment and peer support, which was especially important for people who were feeling isolated.
- Activities provided opportunities to reduce stress, learn new skills, increase confidence and be creative.
- Over twice as many people as last year benefited from the programme, demonstrating a continued need for access to free activities and food for individuals and families who are continuing to experience financial hardship.
- Providing free food alongside activities ensured that the programme contributed to tackling food poverty in a discreet and dignified manner.
- Benefits of the programme included connecting people with each other, reducing social isolation, providing fun activities, and encouraging new people to engage with services. It also helped to create a sense of belonging to the local community, provide the opportunity to learn something new, reduce financial costs and help people to learn about a new service in their local area.
- The programme enabled organisations to enhance their services and engage with new people, thereby raising awareness of their venues and services.

- Providing hot drinks in libraries enabled visitors to stay for longer, encouraged connections with others and provided a community asset where people felt comfortable, regardless of the purpose of their visit.

2. About Winter Connections

2.1. Background

Following a successful Winter Connections programme over the winter of 2022/23, Renfrewshire Council's Leadership Board allocated £75,000 of funding in June 2023 from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to run the programme again during 2023/24.

Once again, the funding provided small grants to local organisations to support delivery of a programme that would encourage people to connect and participate in activities in warm and welcoming spaces across communities in Renfrewshire.

The programme this year also benefited from an additional £10,000 from the Recovery Change Fund to ensure that Winter Connections activities were open to people affected by drugs and alcohol and people living with mental illness.

Local community and voluntary organisations could apply for small grants of up to £2,000 to support with the additional costs of making venues, activities and sessions open as part of the programme. Items eligible for funding included equipment, food, energy costs, and rent.

Funded activities needed to fit the criteria of Winter Connections and be:

- 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

There were 58 applications to the programme which were assessed by officers from Renfrewshire Council, Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership and Engage Renfrewshire.

Of the 58 applications, 46 were successful, 11 were unsuccessful and one application was withdrawn. Unsuccessful applications were signposted to alternative sources of funding where appropriate.

A further £6,000 was allocated to One Ren to support the programme and to provide hot drinks, soup, and snacks in all Renfrewshire libraries. This included drinks and snacks for the twice weekly film club at Ferguslie Park which was set up as part of Winter Connections last year and has continued to run. It also provided free drinks and snacks for families using the SkoobMobile service at their community stops.

Winter Connections branded materials, including posters and stickers as well as leaflets with advice on where to find support with financial worries were also distributed to organisations participating in the programme along with free period products.

A dedicated Winter Connections webpage was set up on the Council's website with an interactive map displaying all venues, activities, and facilities.

Renfrewshire Council worked with Engage and Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership to assess applications to the programme, ensuring a transparent cross-sector approach that enabled partners to evaluate Winter Connections applications based on knowledge of other available support across Renfrewshire.

To understand the impact of the Winter Connections programme, a feedback form was sent to organisations and project visits were made to some projects to assess the difference that the programme had made. 36 organisations returned feedback which has been analysed in the sections below.

2.2. The Winter Connections Programme

This year's programme benefited from a wide range of activities, including scuba diving, Nordic walking, and circus skills. Some activities were open to everyone and aimed to attract families and multiple generations, however some organisations focussed specifically on delivering sessions for children and younger people, for example, youth clubs, while others focussed on activities for older people or people from ethnically diverse communities.

Activities delivered as part of Winter Connections				
Creative activities	Health and Wellbeing	Children and Young People	Social activities	Practical support
Arts & Crafts	Carpet bowling	Youth club	Cinema trips and movie	Signposting to sources of advice
Shrubs to Suds	Fitness classes	Basic cooking class	Coffee mornings	Food provision
Nature crafting sessions (wildflower seed bombs, candle making, natural hand cream making)	Nordic walking	Lego stem club	Quizzes	Access to charge devices
Jewellery making	Scuba diving	Arts & crafts	Bingo	Language café
Painting, drawing and sculpture	Circus skills	Homework/after school club	Lunch Club	Distribution of clothing, period products and data sims
Sewing	Mindfulness, meditation, and stress management	Get Active at the MUGA	Board games	Scottish Refugee Council session for refugees and asylum seekers
	Choir singing		Music	

Activities for young people were often educational as well as fun, such as Lego Stem Club and basic cooking classes.

One project brought ethnically diverse communities together to build and strengthen social connections and to reduce social isolation by organising weekly Community Café Sessions and workshops bringing people from different generations, backgrounds, and experiences together in the local community.

Projects also offered practical support in the form of advice and signposting, distribution of clothing and food and, in the case of Sewing2gether All Nations, a language café for refugee and asylum seekers.

A list of the funded host organisations delivering Winter Connections activities can be found in Appendix 1.

3. Programme Delivery

3.1. Promoting Activities

Renfrewshire Council’s Communications and Marketing team promoted the Winter Connections programme through media and social media. Statistics show that the content was seen on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter by 74,614 times. The posts were engaged with on social media, where people liked, shared, retweeted, etc., a total of 34,356 times. Renfrewshire Council issued 4 media releases, included articles in 7 newsletters and published 4 Facebook posts, 3 tweets and 3 Facebook and Instagram Stories between November 2023 and March 2024. Case studies of 3 organisations were used as part of the promotion. Total web views for the dedicated website were 3,602.

Funded organisations used many different channels to promote their Winter Connections activities. Like last year, the most common way for residents to find out about activities was through social media and word of mouth. In addition to using the Winter Connections branded posters, many organisations created their own posters and distributed these throughout their local communities to promote their activities.

How did people find out about your Winter Connections project?	
Method of information	%
Social media	74
Word of mouth	66
Posters / flyers	43
Contact database/people attending other activities/Whatsapp groups	37
Other organisations e.g. church/sheltered housing/school	29
Referral from another organisation	20
Village or park notice boards	9

Note: All respondents provided more than one answer to this question

Inchinnan Development Trust hand delivered leaflets to the 760 houses in Inchinnan while RIG Arts placed posters and flyers around Seedhill to attract the attention of residents and passersby. They also promoted the project within their own network.



Over a quarter of organisations (29%) that responded had worked with other organisations to promote their activities, for example, sheltered housing complexes, housing associations, local schools and churches. Paisley Methodist Central Hall commented that they had a whole table of people who had been referred to the project by other organisations. CREATE Paisley found that young people encouraged their peers to attend sessions but working with local schools and the local housing association also helped to raise awareness of the project.

Our Winter Connections project was primarily promoted through various channels, including collaboration with Linstone Housing Association and Linwood and Johnstone schools. These organisations played a crucial role in signposting and referring young people to our drop-ins. Additionally, word of mouth among young people was a significant factor in encouraging their peers to attend the sessions.

CREATE Paisley

3.2. What worked well?

The opportunity to bring people together to socialise, meet new people and develop friendships was highlighted as a key factor that contributed to the success of the programme. Access to free and meaningful activities encouraged people to get out and about during the winter months and acted as a lifeline for some, especially those at risk of social isolation. People were able to connect in a way that they may not otherwise have had the chance to and build those connections in an inclusive and welcoming environment.

The activities helped bring people together in a safe space, leading to interesting conversations and plenty of laughter.

St Vincent's Hospice

The programme's emphasis on fostering social connections and community cohesion was another key strength. Through creative workshops, collaborative projects, and shared meals, participants had ample opportunities to build relationships and support networks, combating social isolation and promoting a sense of camaraderie.

RIG Arts

Access to hot drinks, snacks or meals at no cost was another important factor in attracting participants. The Thursday Club was able to provide a warm lunch to almost 100 older people every week and believe that this resulted in attendance at the club remaining high over the winter months. Food provision was particularly helpful for some participants who might not otherwise have had lunch or for those who relied on carers to give them lunch which could often be later in the afternoon. There were often leftovers which members could take home so that they had something to eat in the evening.

Numbers tend to dwindle over winter as people are reluctant to leave their homes, but the combination of a heated hall and hot food and drinks has meant that people have continued to attend over winter. It enables people to turn their heating off for a few hours.

The Thursday Club

Food was also important in encouraging participants at Home Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde groups to continue to attend throughout the winter.

Our groups are run in the morning and many of our families won't have eaten breakfast before attending. Winter attendance can often be interrupted by winter bugs or weather and

the addition of hot food encouraged some of the families to come along at times when they might otherwise have not ventured out.

Home Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde



Hot lunch, Sewing2gether All Nations

Active Communities found that giving children some input into what food they would like to eat whilst guiding them towards healthier choices resulted in a change in attitude towards healthy food.

Some from the group have taken recipes home to cook with their families. It also ensured that the children were given a hot dinner and a warm place after school.

Active Communities

Winter Connections also provided opportunities to enjoy fun activities at no cost. There was a wide variety of activities available that were well spread out across the Renfrewshire area, offering a chance to visit new venues and try something new. All projects were linked through the Winter Connections branding and logo and participants were able to take advantage of the opportunity to attend different activities on different days of the week, giving them something to look forward to every day.

Participants were able to learn new skills and build confidence and the diverse range of activities on offer catered to different ages and interests, ensuring that there was something for everyone.



Offering a diverse range of artistic mediums allowed participants to explore different forms of creative expression, catering to varying interests and skill levels. This diversity ensured that each participant could find something that resonated with them, and we've found this approach incredibly positive for adults that want artistic engagement to help manage ill mental health symptoms.

RIG Arts

Foot painting at Home Start Renfrewshire & Inverclyde

The additional funding contributed by the programme meant that many organisations were able to enhance their existing offer, providing new activities for people and, in the case of St Vincent's Hospice, engaging with members of the public that would not ordinarily engage with their services, raising awareness of their work. For Renfrewshire Effort to Empower Minorities (REEM) the programme offered a platform to widen connections and address social needs that were affecting the community, especially those at risk of isolation.

The additional financial support greatly enhanced our Winter Connections programme, enabling us to make a positive impact by providing warm food, snacks, and high-quality arts and crafts materials. This support was particularly crucial given the rising costs of food and materials.

CREATE Paisley

Another important element of the programme that worked well was the partnership working between projects and other partners. CREATE Paisley believe that the programme created more access points for vulnerable individuals in Renfrewshire. Organisations were able to signpost to services that people may not already have been aware of, and this was the experience at STAR Project, where strong links with the statutory and voluntary sectors were used to support vulnerable individuals.

When individuals accessed our service that we were unable to support (i.e., mental health crisis, health concerns regarding substance use) ... we were subsequently able to refer individuals to their services quickly and effectively, with minimal disruption to the individuals.

STAR Project

Howwood Community Council found that the informal atmosphere at their Winter Connections events encouraged villagers to highlight any concerns that they had, and these could then be raised with the Community Council.

When asked if there was anything that they would change about the programme, nine of the 34 organisations that responded stated that they would not change anything. Suggestions made by the remaining organisations are discussed below.

A few organisations would like to include additional activities or slightly change their service offer, for example having more games or creative activities or expanding the service to send participants home with meal packs. Kilbarchan Improvement Projects, which provided a six-week programme of films and musical entertainment, would like to try a different approach in future.

Having attended the Renfrewshire HSCP and Luminare programme of singing and dementia training recently at Johnstone town hall, we realised that such a programme would be much more beneficial to our guests.

Kilbarchan Improvement Projects

Some organisations worked closely with other partners, for example, Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust engaged with the local Community Link Worker at the GP surgery and arranged for a mental health group to attend their activities. Other organisations would like to improve their links to other services, for example, the STAR Project would invite partners from an advice agency to provide information and support to individuals who attend their activities who are experiencing financial insecurity.



Circus skills, Ferguslie Park

For some projects, a more targeted approach is needed to engage with participants. Community Circus Paisley were hoping to attract older people and anyone at risk of isolation, however most of the participants were home-schooled children.

And whilst it was great to be able to provide activities for so many children and their parents, it wasn't the target audience we envisaged. Since we had to advertise it as open to all there isn't anything we could do to change that. If we ran it again, I'd probably like to work closer with other organisations to reach out to a wider/different audience.

Community Circus Paisley

Another suggestion was to reduce or increase the length of activity sessions or change the starting time to later to support parents who are doing the school run in the morning. Howwood Community Council found that many of their attendees were reluctant to leave and would extend the session for an extra half an hour in future, whereas Ralston Out of School Care would reduce the length of their sessions.

The club might have been a little long for some of the children to focus on the activities. Next time we would run it for about an hour. We did have younger children who wanted to come so we may run the club for younger children.

Ralston Out of School Care

The additional funding contributed by the programme was helpful in providing activities and food however organisations would like to be able to offer activities all year round and many have been asked by participants if they will be delivering more sessions throughout the year.

Other suggestions were to start promoting the activity earlier, move to a larger capacity venue to accommodate increasing numbers of participants and improve accessibility.

In terms of inclusivity, we are exploring funding options to make our Community Art Space 100% wheelchair accessible. This will involve widening the front and office doors, investing in ramps for all doorways and widening access to the Art Space toilet.

RIG Arts

3.3. How many people attended?

Organisations were asked about the number of people who attended their activities. We did not ask organisations to keep track of numbers while delivering activities, but some did, and others provided an estimate.

The average number of people attending each individual session was 25. Activities for younger people and older people were especially popular, for example bingo or coffee mornings and youth clubs. Friends of Howwood Park coffee mornings hosted 50 people at a time while Johnstone Castle Learning Centre's youth sessions provided for around 50 young people aged between 8 and 16 years old. Numbers fluctuated based on weather and holidays from 4 to 40 attendees. A Sewing2gether All Nations workshop attracted 38 participants while Erskine Arts and Rays of Hope averaged around 45 and 30 people respectively each week.



The weekly MUGA sessions have been attended by 20 children on average, with 30 one week. This equates to nearly 50% of the primary school role.

Langbank Swingpark Regeneration

Children enjoying hot chocolate after a MUGA session

The coffee mornings are generally repeat attendees each month, with a few new faces. Same with the fitness classes, bingo and cinema trips. The mindfulness class was attended by 70 different people.

Friends of Howwood Park

From the 35 responses received, it is estimated that 3,900 different people benefited from the Winter Connections programme. Given that there were 45 projects participating in the programme this year, this number will be considerably higher and is already more than twice the number of people who benefited from the programme last year.



Coffee morning, Howwood

While most activities aimed to be intergenerational or to attract a mix of participants, often the type of activity would dictate who would attend. For example, coffee mornings were more likely to attract a mix of older people, bingo attracted all ages including children, while fitness classes and activities such as sewing attracted women.

Who attended your Winter Connections project?		
	Number of projects*	%
Women	24	68
Men	19	54
Children	19	54
Older People	16	46
People from ethnically diverse communities	10	29
Young people / teenagers	7	20
Families	6	17

*out of a total of 35 responses. Note: All respondents provided more than one answer to this question

Of the 35 projects who provided feedback for this question, over two thirds stated that it was mainly women who attended activities, while just under half of all projects appealed to older people. An equal number of projects attracted men and children.

Most attendees were ladies, outnumbering the men by about 4 to 1, mainly on the elderly side with our oldest attendee in her 90's and our youngest just turned 3 years old.

Howwood Community Council

Almost 30% of projects drew in people from ethnically diverse communities compared with 14% last year. This could be explained by the higher number of projects funded this year that work specifically with ethnically diverse communities. A very small number of projects mentioned that individuals with mental health conditions or addictions attended their activities although these were not given as specific options in the feedback form.

Our Winter Connections project provided support for individuals with a diverse demographic, including families with young children, older/vulnerable adults, people from ethnically diverse communities and individuals struggling with substance use. No individual was exempt from our activities; they were all linked by being negatively impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and experiencing social isolation. People accessed the project from all over Renfrewshire, and there was an even distribution between genders. Our largest demographic was primarily local families.

STAR Project



Sewing2gether All Nations

4. Impact of the Programme

4.1. What did organisations learn?

Organisations were asked if, through delivering Winter Connections activity, they had learned anything about what their community wants or needs. The main learning point was that communities are continuing to struggle financially due to the cost-of-living crisis, creating a strong demand for affordable or free of charge activities and that there is a need to continue this support particularly for families during the summer holidays when schools are closed.

RIG Arts learned that there is a need to promote access to nutritious meals for families on low incomes and as a result they are now offering hot food and drink access at all their workshops.

The School of African Cultures found that there were issues around transport and the STAR Project discovered that many of their members were not able to attend as frequently as they wanted to due to issues around irregular bus timetables.

Our sessions finished at 8 PM, and, particularly during December and January, some attendees had to leave early for fear of not getting home.

STAR Project

The importance of communities having a safe space was a recurring theme throughout the feedback and project visits. Howwood Community Council found that the community needs a welcoming space to enjoy opportunities to be together and to meet with friends and form new friendships and that organised events for older people are essential for reducing social isolation and promoting wellbeing.



People were thankful for a safe space to come together and take their minds off things - as such, we're likely to continue this activity through the "warmer" months. We were pleased to hear that people recognised our sessions as a 'safe place' that family members could be dropped off at - there appears to be a lack of knowledge around similar places.

St Vincent's Hospice

Enjoying a craft afternoon at St Vincent's Hospice

In terms of the activities offered, Sewing2gether All Nations noticed that participants prefer to come along to the project when there is also an activity provided and that it is important to have some time before and after the activity to socialise. RIG Arts found that there is a strong desire for accessible and inclusive creative opportunities within the community and there was also a demand for inter-generational activities at Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust and a need to provide affordable activities for people with mental health issues.

The popularity of outdoor activities organised by Friends of Barshaw Park, and nature crafting events held by Inchinnan Development Trust suggests that there is an appetite to participate in activities that connect to the natural world. There are obvious benefits for mental and physical health as well as the well-researched benefits of connecting with others. CREATE Paisley are keen to continue to work with young people in Linwood to provide meaningful activities.

We identified a clear demand for more youth provision in Linwood that is both free and accessible to all young people. CREATE is currently in the process of setting up a youth forum,

quite a few participants from our Linwood drop-in are very keen to participate. This forum will provide a platform for young people to have a voice and actively participate in shaping the youth provision in their community.

CREATE Paisley



A busy Friday at Erskine Arts

4.2. What difference did the Winter Connections Programme make to participants?

Organisations were asked whether they thought that the activities they had delivered as part of the programme had provided any benefits for those attending. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with organisations highlighting several impacts from the programme.

A majority of those who completed feedback forms agreed that the programme activities had supported participants by connecting them to each other, with 92% of organisations reporting this benefit. According to 89% of organisations the programme also contributed

to reducing social isolation, while 83% thought that the provision of fun activities had been beneficial for participants. 81% of organisations thought that activities had encouraged new people to engage with the organisation. Other perceived benefits were creating a sense of belonging to the local community (78% of respondents), providing the opportunity to learn something new (72%) and reducing financial costs and helping people to learn about a new service in their area (67% each).

Benefit to people attending activities	Number of projects*	%
Connecting people to each other	33	92
Reducing social isolation	32	89
Providing fun activities	30	83
Encouraging new people to engage with the project/organisation	29	81
Creating a sense of belonging to the local community/neighbourhood	28	78
Providing the opportunity to learn something new	26	72
Reducing financial costs	24	67
Helping people to learn about a new service in their local area	24	67
Providing access to information/advice	22	61
Providing entertainment for children	17	47

* out of a total of 36 responses

Activities brought people together, connected them with familiar and new faces and created space for generations to be together. Many of the comments from projects related to a feeling of family or feeling part of something giving a sense that activities created a sense of belonging and community cohesion. The new friendships and connections that were forged helped to reduce social isolation and created supportive networks for people to increase their confidence and resilience.



There was such a need for community and that was confirmed when a large group of people sat at the table and talked and laughed, they were lonely and had come along to a place where they met more people and new friendships were formed.

Rays of Hope

RIG Arts found that, for many of their participants who had experienced social isolation or marginalisation, engaging in creative activities, and building relationships with others in the community provided a supportive network that valued their contributions and experiences. Other projects experienced similar impacts.

The programme has strengthened community bonds by bringing diverse people together around shared experiences of creative activities, English language learning, and celebrating festivals and national days in song and dance; our sessions bring a sense of belonging and collective responsibility for each other's well-being as relationships are built, providing peer support for the ups and downs of life everyone experiences.

Sewing2gether All Nations



Celebrating Nowruz, Persian New Year

For some people attendance at the activities was a gateway to continued support and friendship. Inchinnan Development Trust reported that people were glad they had “braved the unfamiliar” and come along to participate in the nature craft activities because they had gained new friends.



Enabled me to meet other first-time fathers and share experiences and receive important support from staff and volunteers. It's given me something important to look forward to each Saturday.

HSRI participant

It's just something to do. Somewhere to go. Friendly and warm. I like to think I made new friends and I'll see them around the town.

Single male participant, struggling with social isolation and ASD, STAR Project participant



Craft activities at Inchinnan Development Trust

Many of the activities on offer helped to improve mental health and reduce stress, from Inchinnan Development Trust's nature crafting sessions to RIG Arts artistic workshops, demonstrating the therapeutic benefits of engaging in creative and outdoor activities.

For many attendees, the sessions served as a source of respite from the challenges they may face in their daily lives, offering a welcoming and supportive environment where they could relax, unwind, and temporarily escape from stressors.

RIG Arts

The programme offered the opportunity for many people to engage in new activities that they may not otherwise have had the chance to try. Many learned new skills or discovered new talents. At Community Circus Paisley children were able to try trampolining and circus skills and parents were able to participate in activities alongside their children and socialise with other parents. Encouragement from project leaders helped to increase confidence for some people.

It was lovely to learn new skills and meet new people all in the beautiful surroundings of India of Inchinnan. Donna presented each session with so much enthusiasm and inspired us all just to have a go.

IDT participants

Every week we have seen people become more confident, more inclined to engage. The noise level at the different events has risen - a sure sign people are getting more relaxed and confident.

Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust

RIG Arts discovered that the activities provided a sense of purpose for participants and some individuals gained the confidence to pursue further learning opportunities and submit their artwork to external arts exhibitions.

Just Dive In supported people to increase their confidence in water-based activities.



Case Study: Just Dive In CIC

John*, a 65-year-old recent retiree, initially joined Just Dive In CIC as a spectator, accompanying his wife to her water confidence classes. With no prior interest in aquatic activities, he was content to observe from the sidelines.

Encouraged by the inclusive atmosphere and witnessing the joy and progress of participants, John decided to take a leap of faith and enrolled in the beginner scuba sessions. What started as a curiosity evolved into a passion, as John discovered not only a talent for scuba diving but also a therapeutic connection to the water that he had never anticipated.

John's journey from observer to enthusiastic diver exemplifies the inclusive and transformative nature of Just Dive In CIC's programme. His active participation has not only enriched his retirement years but also inspired others to step out of their comfort zones and explore new horizons.

*name changed

Organisations commented that the programme had led to people discovering new venues and projects, helping to raise awareness of the organisation’s work and the wider support available within the community. Friends of Barshaw Park reported that people had discovered their venue for the first time and plan to revisit, while St Mark’s Oldhall found that the programme encouraged some people to come into their church led café for the first time.

Hosting Winter Connections activities has encouraged Ralston Out of School Care to develop their project, taking on board feedback from parents about activities that their children might be interested in trying.

It in turn has given us new ideas to run more activity clubs for the children in the area.

Ralston OSC

The offering of hot food and drink contributed to alleviating stress and financial strain for many families and individuals and helped to address food insecurity. Home Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde found that the hot food helped to maintain attendance at a time of year when it can be challenging for families to go out.

We found our groups were more consistently attended and families were staying for longer enabling them to save on their food and heating in their own homes as well as connect with others in their community. Our schedule of Groups is a crucial part of the Home-Start service and attendance is often a big step for families.

Home Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde



Active Communities project offered the opportunity to learn about nutritious food in a fun way and helped to improve young people’s awareness of a healthy diet and increase their confidence to try new foods. In addition to activities and food, KLAS Care also provided access to clothing donations and toys at Christmas.

Healthy snacks, Sewing2gether All Nations

Hot food and good company! I just really loved having somewhere to take the kids where I knew they would be safe playing with their friends, get their dinner, get a wee bit of help with homework and I got to relax for a while. It was like visiting with family and it really helped me over winter.

Mum of a family of 6 living in Gallowhill who participated in the STAR Project

It was important to ensure that families could access support with dignity and, because the programme enabled access to food and wider support through participation in activities which were open to all, this helped to remove any stigma about accessing these services. Several projects also provided information and advice for parents through working with partner organisations, for example, Citizens Advice Bureau.

Our Winter Connections project has resulted in community members in challenging circumstances experiencing improved connections (with themselves, others, and their community) and less isolation. Further, their wellbeing was improved through increased confidence, hope, and aspiration. Offering the community extended access to a warm space and including it as part of our main programme meant people did not feel stigmatised by accessing it.

STAR Project

For some organisations, the impact for participants was so beneficial that they are continuing to fund their Winter Connections activities and food through alternative sources of funding, such as tea money and donations.

Feedback from libraries suggests that the snacks they provided were popular with children and were even more appreciated during holiday periods when there was no access to school meals. In addition, providing hot drinks for visitors encouraged them to stay longer in the library and socialise with others.

Comments from attendees at library activities

Library and staff are wonderful – a cuppa, a wee seat, a knit and natter and pleasure of listening to all the babies singing.

We have a gentleman who is in everyday, perhaps 2 or 3 times and has soup and coffee. So much so that he now has his own mug as we'd go through so many cups otherwise. On our late opening day, a Tuesday, he goes to Central in the morning and then comes to us in the afternoon. Not only does he have the tea and soup, but he also uses us as a warm space. He very rarely borrows a book or uses a PC but reads the daily newspapers. We like to think of our library as a warm friendly place where people feel comfortable, regardless of the purpose of their visit.

I am part of the knitting group in Renfrew library and am so pleased that I have joined as I suffer from anxiety and feel this group helps me immensely to socialise. If this was not available, I would feel isolated at home as I live alone.

We have a play session after our Bookbug sessions and some of the mums/grans/carers stay behind and have a tea or coffee and it gives them a chance to chat with other young mums. Many of them are in a position where they don't have friends their own age and many have formed bonds and not only meet at Bookbug but also at other times and have established friendships.



Quiz at Renfrew library



Children at Ferguslie library

5. What did we learn?

As a funder we have learned that the following elements are important in supporting local voluntary and community organisations to deliver activities that are tailored to the needs of their community.

- A straightforward and accessible application process makes it easy for organisations to apply
- Well organised, friendly and supportive assistance alongside the smooth transition of funds enables organisations to focus on planning and delivering their activities
- Organisations appreciate the provision of good promotional materials to help promote their project
- Organisations value a named person to email or talk to about their project or funding application
- Having a feedback form that is easy to complete results in a higher rate of return of forms
- A flexible funding approach allows organisations to tailor their projects to the needs of their communities

Clear communication about funding and applications. Useful resource pack supplied and great to have a visit from the funder to see our service in action and to hear more about other organisations in the programme.

Home Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde

Renfrewshire Council's flexible funding approach allows us to tailor our projects to the specific needs and priorities of the Seedhill community. This flexibility ensures that funded activities are responsive to local contexts and can adapt to changing circumstances or emerging opportunities. Additionally, the reliability of funding from Renfrewshire Council provides stability and predictability for organisations hosting Winter Connections activities. This allowed us to focus on program delivery and community engagement without the uncertainty often associated with securing funding.

RIG Arts

5.1. Areas for improvement

Of the 34 projects that responded to a question about where the Winter Connections programme could be improved, nearly 30% felt that the programme did not need any improvements. The remaining projects suggested the following:

Promotion of the programme

- Providing posters with blank spaces for projects to complete with Where, Who, When, How to book/who to contact
- New posters
- A QR Code poster that will link to all the activities
- More publicity for the programme including more social media coverage and advice on how to publicise activities more widely

Additional Funding

More funding to cover overhead costs

Small amounts of funding to continue clubs and activities would be good. We have purchased the hardware we needed but to continue the club for free we would need money for lets and snacks for the kids. It is something we could roll out to other areas, schools, libraries etc. if we had the funding and support.

Ralston OSC

Planning and timescale of the programme

Although the programme started a month earlier than last year, organisations would like the funding process to start earlier to help them to get everything in place and to provide more of a gap between approval of funding and starting projects. They would also like the timescales to be extended.

Improvements could include securing more funding and initiating the planning process earlier. Extending the period of funding to cover the autumn months could also enhance the programme's impact and reach within the community.

CREATE Paisley

Would like to see an opportunity for groups to get support to continue activities year-round if they are successful. People attending our class are already dreading when it comes to an end just as they are getting into a routine.

Thorn Athletic Community Trust

Creating a Winter Connections Community of Learning

Some organisations were keen to network with other funded projects to share good practice and suggested the following:

- Support to connect different groups together to reach a wider audience
- Opportunities to network and build links with other funded organisations
- Offering additional support and resources such as capacity-building workshops, networking opportunities, or mentorship programs to help organisations develop their skills

Encouraging collaboration and partnerships among your different funded projects could leverage resources and expertise more effectively, leading to greater impact and sustainability. This could involve facilitating networking events or creating platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration among grantees.

RIG Arts

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The Winter Connections programme aimed to encourage people to connect and participate in activities in warm and welcoming spaces across communities in Renfrewshire. Feedback suggests that the programme continues to be successful in benefitting attendees by connecting them to each other and creating a sense of belonging to their local community. There is also evidence that the programme provides an inclusive and supportive environment for people to engage with services, helping to reduce social isolation, reduce financial costs and provide access to information and advice. The activities on offer were enjoyed by all ages and allowed access to new experiences.

Whilst the programme has been a great success, there are some recommendations to be considered if a similar programme is to be delivered in future.

Recommendation 1 – Winter Connections projects are currently open to anyone, however feedback indicates that some projects would benefit from the flexibility to take a more targeted approach to some of the activities, for example, for older people or for those from ethnically diverse communities where there may be a need for activities for women only.

Recommendation 2 - It may be helpful to set up a networking meeting with previously funded organisations to share good practice about the delivery of Winter Connections activities, and to support community connections at an organisational level.

Recommendation 3 – Although the programme started earlier this year feedback from projects suggests that starting the funding process even earlier would provide projects with more time to plan activities.

7. Appendix 1

Organisations which hosted Winter Connections activity

Active Communities Scotland Ltd	Mountain Ash Club
Brick Lane Music Academy CIC	Our Place Our Families
CREATE Paisley	Pachedu
Community Circus Paisley	Paisley Methodist Central Halls
Erskine Arts	Paisley St George's Outreach Centre
Friends of Barshaw Park	Ralston Primary Out of School Care
Friends of Howwood Park	Rays of Hope
Foxbar Elderly Forum	Renfrew YMCA SCIO
Home-Start Renfrewshire & Inverclyde	Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies
Howwood Community Council	Renfrewshire Effort to Empower Minorities (REEM)
Inchinnan Development Trust	RIG Arts
Johnstone Castle Learning Centre	ROAR – Connections for Life Ltd
Just Dive In CIC	School of African Cultures
Kickin' On	Scottish Afro Caribbean Arts Association (SACAA)
Kilbarchan Improvement Project	Sewing2gether All Nations
KLAS Care CIC	St Mark's (Oldhall) Church of Scotland
Langbank Swingpark Regeneration	St Vincent's Hospice Ltd
Linwood Baptist Church	The Thursday Club
Linwood Community Council	The Star Project
Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust	Thorn Athletic Community Trust
Loud n Proud	Twist and Hit Cheerleaders

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