



Renfrewshire
Council

To: Leadership Board

On: 6 December 2023

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Fairer Renfrewshire Update

1. Summary

1.1 The Council and its partners continue to work together to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire Programme, with a strong shared focus currently on the local response to the cost-of-living crisis. This paper provides a summary of the key headline issues relating to the local response, as reported to the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee on 15 November 2023.

1.2 Specific updates are provided in relation to:

- The most recent programme update including information on recent statistics and research in relation to the cost of living crisis.
- The initial evaluation findings in relation to the Summer of Fun programme supported by Fairer Renfrewshire funding; and
- An initial report on the work being undertaken across the Council to review the school meal debt process.

1.3 Officers continue to work with partners to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. Priority actions over the next quarter include:

- Progressing a 'deep dive' data exercise around child poverty as a Community Planning Partnership, focussing on the six priority family groups, with an initial exercise about to commence in relation to Gallowhill.
 - Continuing the evaluation of Tackling Poverty funded projects and developing proposals for the 2024 Fairer Renfrewshire Programme
 - Continuing to develop and promote this year's Winter Connections programme
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2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that elected members:

- Note the content of the report and the work being undertaken to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme;
- Note information provided at Appendix 1 on the allocation of Winter Connections Funding by the Head of Policy and Partnerships under delegated authority previously agreed by the Board;
- Approve the allocation of £6,000 from Fairer Renfrewshire funding, to be allocated to One Ren to deliver Winter Connections activities across community venues.

3. Background

3.1 The Fairer Renfrewshire Programme has continued to develop during 2023, with the immediate focus of the Council and its partners being in relation to the ongoing cost of living response and wider initiatives which seek to tackle poverty and inequality. This is a fast paced and constantly evolving programme and the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee continues to meet to provide oversight on all related activities being undertaken.

3.2 At its meeting on 15 November 2023, the sub-committee considered:

- The most recent programme update including information on recent statistics and research in relation to the cost of living crisis.
- The initial evaluation findings in relation to the Summer of Fun programme supported by Fairer Renfrewshire funding; and
- An initial report on the work being undertaken across the Council to review the school meal debt process.

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

- The rate of inflation has remained at 6.7% (Sep 23), still well above the 2% target set by the Bank of England
- The inflation rate for food has reduced slightly; now 12.2%.
- The Bank of England has recently kept the interest rate unchanged at 5.25% which is the highest rate in 15 years.
- The Energy Price Cap, originally introduced by Ofgem in January 2019 to set limits on the underlying rates energy suppliers, is now set at £1,834 from the 1 October until 31 December. This means households who use gas and electricity and pay by direct debit will pay on average £1,834, with the reduction reflecting recent falls in wholesale energy prices.

- 3.4 The cost of living report presented also highlighted research published by the Joseph Rowantree Foundation in October through its “Poverty in Scotland” report. The report highlights the issue of increasing levels of in-work poverty and found that over one million people still live in poverty in Scotland, with nearly half of those (490,000) living in very deep poverty and around a quarter being children. Their report also suggests that with inflation rates still high, this winter will be difficult especially for those living in poverty with a continuing struggle to afford essentials for their households.
- 3.5 This is also being reflected in local data, with advice agencies noticing an increase in those who are working coming forward for support both around debt, and for advice more generally. For example, Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau reports a significant increase in the number of debt clients in full time work (35% increase). The Bureau has also seen an increase in the numbers of those with debt issues generally who are coming forward for support at 363 this quarter against 268 for the same quarter last year.
- 3.6 The Council’s Advice Works service has seen a rise in the numbers of clients who are working full time. In their Quarter 1, to 30 June 2023, more clients who were working full time were seen than those working part time at 97 compared to 74, with 11 self employed people also coming forward. They have also noted an increase in foodbank vouchers being given to those in work.
- 3.7 Renfrewshire Affordable Credit Alliance are currently carrying out a survey on savings, borrowing and debt, which we hope will provide useful information and help paint a picture of borrowing, including illegal borrowing across Renfrewshire to support further targeted work on this issue.

4. Programme Updates

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

Stronger start

- 4.2 As previously reported to the Sub-Committee, Renfrewshire Council has been working with Renfrewshire HSCP, NHSGGC and Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau to develop a pilot for an advice and advocacy service within the Special Needs in Pregnancy service (SNIPs) at the Royal Alexandra Hospital and apply for external funding for this service. Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau were recently successful in an application to the National Lottery Improving Lives Fund, and have been awarded £95,000 to run a pilot of the service for one year.
- 4.3 The service, called Stronger Start, will work with pregnant women who have complex needs. It is intended to offer both income maximisation advice, but also individual support and advocacy around a range of issues and will also develop robust referral pathways with partners in the public and third sectors. Due to the geographical area the RAH works across, the service will cover Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire families too.

- 4.4 A Steering Group formed from Renfrewshire Citizens Advice, Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire HSCP along with NHSGGC and Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire HSCPs are now working to put the service in place with a provisional date of January 2024.

School support service

- 4.5 The School Support service provided by Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau commenced at the start of the school year, with the first appointments being delivered week commencing 23 August. From that date until the October week, 50 appointments had been attended across schools, with numbers around 6 per week. The final week before the holidays showed a marked increase to 12 appointments.
- 4.6 Reasons for appointments have been varied, with advice and support provided around benefits including Child and Adult Disability Payments and Universal Credit as well as Further Education, Energy Advice and Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
- 4.7 A session was held in mid November to review the service to date and make any changes necessary to processes and arrange better promotion in schools where there have been fewer appointments. Feedback from schools has been very positive to date.

School meal debt

- 4.8 In early 2023, members of the sub-committee requested further information in relation to school meal debt in Renfrewshire, with a focus on understanding how the issue is handled and what level of support is provided to families that may be experiencing financial insecurity. Officers from the Policy and Partnerships team raised this issue through the Fairer Renfrewshire Officer Group and were advised of ongoing work that was underway to review local arrangements in relation to school meal debt, in response to the findings of a local internal audit review of related processes and systems, and emerging national guidance and policy developments in relation to school meal debt.
- 4.9 In the intervening period, there have been a range of policy developments at a national level, following a study undertaken by Aberlour and new best practice principles for the management of school meal debt which have been published by COSLA.
- 4.10 As reported to Leadership Board in June 2023, it is important that any review of school meal debt management supports local partnership activities to tackle the level of financial insecurity and poverty which is being faced by low-income families in Renfrewshire. A paper was provided to the sub-committee at its meeting in November, which was intended to be an initial update for members on the work that has been undertaken locally to review existing school meal debt processes. It also set out next steps in terms of implementing a new more holistic approach to school meal debt management in Renfrewshire.
- 4.11 As reported separately to elected members following a recent FOI and related media enquiries, all debts that are incurred through the cashless catering system "Parent Pay" have historically been transferred to the Council's Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP) once an invoice was raised at a specific level. Subsequent non payment would then trigger the council's sundry debt recovery processes, which involves passing unpaid debts

to the Council's collection agent if they remain unpaid after the timetable for recovery has passed. The collection agent has no powers to take any form of legal recovery action but will contact a customer regarding any unpaid debt. In order to pursue legal action, a court decree would be required, and the Council has never sought to obtain a decree in relation to school meal debt. In light of the current review of school meal debt, the use of a collection agent for school meal debt has been paused.

- 4.12 It is recognised in the COSLA guidance that local authorities may also wish to consider their local response to the Aberlour review recommendations on the write-off of school meal debt. As noted above, whilst the review of the current school meal debt processes is underway, no new invoices for accrued debt will be issued. For those cases where an invoice has already been issued, the Director of Finance and Resources will use his delegated authority to write-off the debt. The amount to be written off is £47,573.25.

Summer of Fun programme

- 4.13 As previously reported to the Leadership Board, in March 2023, core funding of £100,000 was allocated through the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the development of a summer holiday programme, with a focus on providing support over the holiday period to low-income families. £20,000 of funding was also allocated from the Future Paisley programme to enhance cultural experiences for low-income households.
- 4.14 In late June 2023, Renfrewshire received a further £120,655 from the Scottish Government as part of their national programme to enhance summer holiday and food provision. This funding was targeted at providing access to activities, childcare and food during the summer holiday period for school age children from low-income families. This brought the funding total to £240,655 allocated to Renfrewshire's Summer of Fun programme.
- 4.15 A diverse programme was developed to deliver a range of activities for children, families, and young people across Renfrewshire to access over the holidays. This was developed and co-ordinated jointly by the Community Learning and Development and Partnerships and Inequalities team within the Chief Executive's Service, in consultation with the Fairer Renfrewshire sub-committee and the Fairer Renfrewshire Lived Experience Panel.
- 4.16 Initial findings from an evaluation have been considered by the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee, following the submission of the evaluation to the Communities and Housing Board. Options for future summer provision will be developed for consideration as part of the 2024 Fairer Renfrewshire programme proposals which will be submitted to the Leadership Board for consideration in early 2024.

Digital inclusion

- 4.17 In December 2021, Leadership Board allocated £100,000 to support work around digital inclusion. £80,000 of this sum was allocated to OneRen to co-ordinate a Digital Champions programme, with a further £20,000 allocated to support further research and evaluation in digital exclusion in partnership with SCVO and a community device refurbishment initiative. In addition to the funding support, the new Digital Delivery Manager, in post since July, has

been working with the existing Digital partnerships in Renfrewshire to better understand the digital landscape.

- 4.18 One of these partnerships, Renfrewshire's Citizens Voice Forum, was established in 2021, and is led by Renfrewshire Council in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). The Forum seeks to mitigate digital exclusion through co-designing digital inclusion solutions with partners including consideration of a hyper-local broadband social tariff campaign in order to raise awareness and uptake of Broadband Social Tariffs.
- 4.19 Using the £80,000 allocated, and with support from Citizens Voice, OneRen recruited a Digital Champion Coordinator in May 2023 for a two year period. To date, the Coordinator has trained five digital champions, who have in turn supported 60+ learners with over 50 hours spent supporting learners. Plans are being progressed to establish a Digital Champions Network in early 2024, whereby bringing Digital Champions together, enabling them to share, learn, support and collaborate with each other with the aim of benefitting learners / end users.
- 4.20 A sub-group of Citizens Voice has also been working to introduce the DigiZone initiative. DigiZones will be locations within Renfrewshire where any member of the public can connect to the internet as a minimum, but may also be able to gain digital skills support and access devices. Starting with OneRen libraries, it is intended that partner organisations will sign up to become a DigiZone, advertising which digital supports they can provide.
- 4.21 With regard to the community device refurbishment initiative, a Device Recycling Sub-Group (of Citizens Voice Forum) has been set up and has undertaken a scoping exercise to understand device recycling and refurbishment organisations operating across Scotland. This work builds on work being progressed by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) at a national level who hosted an event in Stirling in September, bringing together such organisations.
- 4.22 The Sub-Group are currently working with an Ayrshire-based Device Recycling/Refurbishment Charity, who has expressed an interest in having a presence and supporting digital inclusion in Renfrewshire. The Charity is currently being supported via Engage Renfrewshire and Council Services to seek appropriate premises to operate from and potential funding opportunities to apply to. The Council's Economic Development team are also working with the organisation to see where there's a fit with employability.
- 4.23 Renfrewshire's #DigiRen network also supports digital and data equity, whilst ensuring no-one is left behind. #DigiRen comprises 150 local and national organisations representing the Public, and third sectors including Social Housing and also has members representing the Academia Sector, sharing a common goal of closing the digital and data divide in Renfrewshire (and beyond). #DigiRen is a collaboration space for partners and organisations to share information and best practice on digital inclusion, learn from each other, support initiatives and each other and help grow both the Network and organisations. The group is jointly chaired by Engage Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire Council.
- 4.24 In recognition of the strong partnership working locally on this issue, Renfrewshire was selected as a case study as part of a national Digital Exclusion audit. The report will be published during the first half of 2024.

5. Winter Connections

- 5.1 After the success of the Winter Connections programme in 2022/23, the new programme for winter 23/24 has launched, with the fund opening to applications at the end of September. The fund comprises £75,000 from the Fairer Renfrewshire budget with a further £10,000 from the Recovery Change Programme to reduce stigma and to make sure activities are accessible to people in recovery from mental health issues or alcohol and drug use.
- 5.2 Like last year, organisations are able to bid for up to £2000 to provide activities which are:
- Open, free and easy to access
 - Inclusive, welcoming, respectful, and safe
 - Able or willing to provide connections to other services and supports
 - Able to offer warm drinks/snacks/food along with activities, where possible
- 5.3 A Panel comprising Renfrewshire Council, Renfrewshire HSCP and Engage Renfrewshire has been set up to scrutinise applications and make recommendations to the Head of Policy and Partnerships, who has been delegated authority to make decisions on funding to support speedy distribution of funds.
- 5.4 As at 28th November, 32 applications for funding have been approved under this delegated authority totalling £62,638.50, with the panel looking at range and time of activities as well as geographical split before making recommendations to ensure coverage is as wide as possible across Renfrewshire. A full list of applications and approvals is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 5.5 Officers are also working with OneRen Libraries to extend provision of a range of activities across all Renfrewshire libraries as last year, and in addition allow libraries to offer hot drinks to all those attending the library. This paper seeks approval to award funding of £6,000 from the Fairer Renfrewshire funding to One Ren to deliver Winter Connections activities this year.

6 Next steps

- 6.1 Officers continue to work with partners to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. Priority actions over the next quarter include:
- Progressing a 'deep dive' data exercise around child poverty as a Community Planning Partnership, focussing on the six priority family groups, with an initial exercise about to commence in relation to Gallowhill.
 - Continuing the evaluation of Tackling Poverty funded projects and developing proposals for the 2024 Fairer Renfrewshire Programme
 - Continuing to develop and promote this year's Winter Connections programme.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – this paper provides an update on the allocation of funding to community organisations through the Winter Connections Programme. It also seeks approval to allocate £6k to One Ren to deliver Winter Connections activities.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – This report provides a summary of current partnership activities being progressed through the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, with a key focus on tackling the inequalities that exist in Renfrewshire.
4. **Legal** - none
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality and Human Rights** – The report provides an overview of the position around household income and expenditure, and is for noting. As such there are no impacts arising from the recommendation of this paper. It is however important to note that impacts on households explored within this paper are likely to be disproportionately felt by equality groups.
8. **Health and Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none
13. **Climate Risk** – none

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Appendix 1 – Winter Connections Grant Funding

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

St Mark's (Oldhall) Church of Scotland	Paisley	£2,000	Winter Connection Wednesday Welcome -	£2,000
Kilbarchan Improvement Project	Kilbarchan	£1,200	Winter Movies	£1,200
Howwood Community Council	Howwood	£2,000	Winter Warmer Programme	£2,000
Foxbar Elderly Forum		£2,000	Lunchtime Buddies	£2,000
Kickin' On		£2,000	Unit 23 Social Space	£2,000
Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust	Lochwinnoch	£2,000	Youth Drop In Sessions	£2,000
Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust	Lochwinnoch	£1,960	Men's Shed & Teenage Health & Wellbeing Workshops	£1,960

Applications not recommended for approval

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