

To: Leadership Board

On: 19 June 2024

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.
- 1.2 This paper provides a summary of the key headline issues, as reported to the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee on 5 June 2024. Specific updates were also provided in relation to:
- The Summer of Fun Programme for 2024
 - The evaluation of the Winter Connections programme
- 1.3 Officers continue to work with partners to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. Priority actions over the next quarter include:
- Developing and delivering the summer holiday programme
 - Development of equalities workstream as detailed in February 2024 Leadership Board
 - Launch of Renfrewshire Community Survey 2024
-

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 locally.

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 As previously reported to Board, four key themes were identified for the initial Fairer Renfrewshire programme:

- Improving financial security
- Advancing equality of opportunity
- Building community capacity and resilience
- Listening to lived experience

3.3 At its meeting on 27 March 2024, the sub-committee considered:

- The most recent programme update including information on recent statistics and research in relation to the cost-of-living crisis, including the cost of living dashboard developed locally
- Updates in relation new projects being brought forward such as the Schools Support Service providing advice in secondary schools, as well as progress updates on priority actions such as supporting the Fairer Renfrewshire lived experience panel
- The findings from the evaluation of the Winter Connections Programme.
- A presentation on the delivery of the Summer of Fun food and activity programme

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

- The rate of inflation has reduced to 2.3% (April 24)
- 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 £1690 from the 1 April until 30 June. This is the lowest rate for 2 years, with the predicted rate from 1 July to reduce further to £1560.

4. Fairer Renfrewshire Programme Update

4.1 Since the last update to Leadership Board in May 2024, a range of activities have continued to be progressed by officers and partners. A summary is provided in the sections below.

Scottish Government Council Tax Debt Pilot Project

- 4.2 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 which would seek to improve the journey of those who are in council tax arrears or struggling to make council tax payment.
- 4.3 The Pilot ran to the end of March 2024, however due to the very short period of the Pilot the following actions were completed:
- A leaflet was designed approved and sent out with the reminders for those who hadn't paid.
 - The information on the Council Tax area of the Council Website was updated to make it more user friendly and signpost to Advice Works where people are struggling to pay their CT bill.
 - Agreement made with Corporate Comms that the Panel will be involved in the run up to the bills going out next year.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.

School Support Service

- 4.6 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. As reported previously to the Leadership Board, initial contacts through the service had initially been lower than anticipated, and work has been undertaken to link with officers across Children's Services to increase promotion of the service, particularly in schools where take up had been low. Initial data received from RCAB since April 2024, indicates that numbers have increased and are more consistent across all schools.
- 4.7 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 In April the panel discussed the plans for Summer of Fun programme, providing feedback on proposed guidance for the grants programme and communication of the summer programme. The Panel also recently attended 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.
- 4.10 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 being planned, where members of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee, officers from the Fairer Renfrewshire Officer Group and the Lived Experience Panel will come together to 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

- 4.11 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.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 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

- 4.15 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.

- 4.16 531 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.
- 4.17 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%).

Thrive under 5

- 4.18 The Thrive under 5 programme launched on 22 May at Station 7 in Johnstone with an initial pilot being 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.
- 4.19 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.
- 4.20 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. Winter Connections

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 An evaluation has now been carried out on the 23/24 programme, and the key messages of the evaluation include:
- As in previous programmes, 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 Work will commence shortly on the 2024 programme.

6. Summer of Fun Programme

6.1 Officers are currently working with partners to develop and deliver the Summer of Fun holiday programme in Renfrewshire with £100,000 available to deliver the programme in Summer 2024. As previously agreed by the Leadership Board in May 2024, £50,000 of this funding has been allocated through a grant funding round open to all local third and community organisations. In line with delegations previously agreed by the Board, 11 grants have been awarded by the Head of Policy and Partnerships totalling £36,415.40, in consultation with the Council Leader. Further detail is provided within Appendix 2 to this report.

6.2 A summer activity programme will be delivered in partnership between CLD staff and Streetstuff over a 5 week period in the Summer across 6 locations. Work has been undertaken to prioritise access to camp bookings to families with children in the child poverty priority groups and through referrals from Childrens Services before booking access is widened out further. Targeted family learning and youth service activities are being planned and will be delivered, as will the regular programme of Streetstuff activities over the summer. Colleagues in One Ren are also planning their summer programme, and we are working with the libraries and Skoobmobile team in particular to support and promote activities which will be delivered during the summer period.

- 6.3 Officers are working with partners to communicate and share information on all the activities that are available throughout the Summer in Renfrewshire, ensuring that all opportunities are highlighted to local families.
- 6.4 A progress update on the planning and development of the Summer of Fun programme was given at the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee on 5th June 2024.
-

7. Next steps

- 7.1 Officers continue to work with partners to progress the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. Priority actions over the next quarter include:
- Developing and delivering the summer holiday programme
 - Development of equalities workstream as detailed in February 2024 Leadership Board
 - Community Impact survey to be progressed following election.
-

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – no additional funding allocations are recommended.
 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 key activities undertaken as part of the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, and as such there continues to be a high level of equalities and human rights consideration across this programme – the activities detailed in this report are targeted specifically at advancing equality of opportunity for a number of groups across the Renfrewshire area.
 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



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.



Children enjoying hot chocolate after a MUGA session

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

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

A big thank you to all of the organisations who provided feedback, quotes, photographs and video links for this report.

Chief Executive's Service
Renfrewshire Council
Renfrewshire House
Cotton Street
Paisley
PA1 1BR

www.renfrewshire.gov.uk



Appendix 2

Applications approved under delegated authority				
Organisation	Area	Funding Requested	Purpose	Funding approved
Just Dive In	Paisley	£3,500	Marine Marvels Summer Programme	£3,500
KLAS Care CIC	Linwood	£2,975	Schools Out for Summer 24	£2,975
Outspoken Arts	Paisley	£3,450	Big Art Show Summer Camp	£3,450
Thorn Athletic Community Trust	Johnstone	£3,500	Summer Football Fun	£3,500
Twist and Hit Cheerleaders	Paisley	£3,500	Active Summer: Cheerleading and More!	£3,500
Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies	Paisley	£3,000	P1-P7 Youth Club	£3,000
The New Tannahill Centre	Paisley	£3,500.40	Ferguslie Summer of Fun (pilot)	£3,500
Brick Lane Music Academy	Paisley	£3,480	Kids and Families Summer Workshops	£3,480
Erskine Arts	Erskine	£3,440	An Erskine Arts Summer	£3,440
Friends of Knockhill Park	Renfrew	£3,060	Let's Get Outdoors 2024	£3,060
Sewing2gether All Nations: Caring, Creating, Connecting	Paisley	£3,010	Summer of Fun @ All Nations activities such as practice	£3,010