

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