

**To: Leadership Board**

**On: 16 June 2021**

---

**Report by: Chief Executive**

---

**Heading: Social Renewal Plan – Action Plan Update**

---

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 In March 2021, Council considered the initial findings from a community impact assessment that had been undertaken across Renfrewshire, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on local people and communities. This provided strong evidence that the pandemic has impacted some people and communities more profoundly than others.
- 1.2 The starting point of local people in terms of the inequalities or challenges that they faced before the pandemic has been important, with issues such as low income, insecure employment, caring responsibilities and disabilities all being exacerbated by the pandemic and its associated restrictions. The community impact assessment process also identified a requirement to continue to listen and learn to the experiences of local people, recognising that the impacts of the pandemic may emerge over time.
- 1.3 In the report in March 2021, an initial Social Renewal Plan was approved by Council. The plan set out the high-level actions that the Council and partners will take as we move forward from the pandemic with a clear focus on **tackling inequality and improving wellbeing.**
- 1.4 Partners are not starting from scratch:

- A range of existing programmes of work are already under way which will support social renewal and are key to delivering on local priorities;
- Partners have worked together and with local communities to respond to the immediate impacts arising from the pandemic, and there is learning and innovation that can be embedded in a more sustainable way to support local people and communities; and
- The community impact assessment has provided a solid evidence base upon which partners and communities can work together to tackle the challenges and opportunities identified and make sure that we are ready to support this next phase of the pandemic.

1.5 Officers have worked to bring all of these strands of activity together, and following an initial assessment have identified a number of actions which should be progressed by partners as a priority during 2021. These specifically relate to:

- **Income, poverty and financial security**
- **Community resilience and capacity**
- **Digital exclusion**

1.6 Members will recognise that there was a significant amount of activity around these 3 themes prior to the emergence of the pandemic, and over the past 12-15 months there has been a strong focus from partners on responding to the immediate needs of local people who were experiencing issues in relation to poverty and inequality, including struggling to pay for food and fuel or unable to access digital technology when they needed this.

1.7 Community and third sector organisations played a vital role in working with the Council and partners to respond to the impact of the pandemic, and there is a need now to look to address these needs in a more sustainable way, as well as ensuring that all local partners are ready to support local people as these needs change over time. The next 6 months will see the end of furlough and restrictions relating to evictions for example, and there is a need to plan ahead to ensure local partners are ready to respond. This work will include the development of the next phase of the Tackling Poverty Programme.

1.8 Section 4 of this paper provides further detail on a range of specific proposals which are presented for approval by elected members. In total it is recommended that £0.665m is allocated to support activities in relation to these three key themes, the funding from which will be drawn from the £2.706m funding set aside in the Council budget in March 2021 to support the delivery of the Social Renewal Plan. Elected members will recall that this

funding was committed to support the organisation in being able to respond flexibly to the emerging impacts of the pandemic.

1.9 In taking forward the Social Renewal Plan, officers will also be continuing to work with partners to consider the impact of the pandemic in terms of particular communities of interest or specific issues including:

- local people impacted by disruption to health treatment or issues accessing this
- social isolation and mental health
- unpaid carers
- children and young people and their families
- people from equality groups such as black and minority ethnic people, disabled people etc.

1.10 A further update on this programme of work will be provided in late 2021 to the Leadership Board.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1 It is recommended that members:

- Note the work that has been undertaken to progress the Social Renewal Plan in Renfrewshire; and
- Agree the proposals detailed in full within section 4 to allocate £0.665m of funding to progress a number of immediate priorities identified through the Social Renewal Plan, with the breakdown of funding provided in section 4.24.

## **3. Background**

3.1 In September 2020, Council agreed that a community impact assessment should be undertaken in Renfrewshire, in order to develop a much deeper understanding of the impact that COVID-19 has had on local people and communities.

3.2 It was recognised that the issues being experienced were likely to emerge over an extended period of time, and that partners would need to work together to continually assess and respond to challenges as these emerged over time.

3.3 Between September 2020 and March 2021, officers worked to undertake and complete the first phase of the community impact assessment through a range of listening events, surveys, research and analysis of local and national data with findings indicating:

- Local people had felt the impact of COVID-19 directly with high numbers of infections and deaths, comparatively to other areas

- Some particular groups across Renfrewshire have been more disproportionately impacted than others, with evidence that the starting point of an individual prior to the pandemic was important to being able to manage the impact.
- An increasing number of low-income households are struggling to manage financially and need support with food and fuel costs.
- Local people are self-reporting high levels of mental health and wellbeing concerns.
- There was evidence that local people had not been able to access existing or new medical treatment and support for conditions or illnesses.
- Children, young people and families had been significantly impacted, and there was concern about the longer-term consequences to life outcomes
- Digital technology had supported many people during the pandemic, however specific groups of people felt they were being left behind.

3.4 The findings from the community impact assessment were used to inform the development of an initial Social Renewal Plan for Renfrewshire, which was approved by Council on 4 March 2021.

3.5 The Social Renewal Plan sets out the high-level actions that will need to be taken forward by all partners as we move forward from the pandemic and support recovery across Renfrewshire’s communities, with a **joint partnership focus on tackling inequality and improving wellbeing**. These actions have been endorsed by the Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership and are grouped across a number of key themes:

<b>Income poverty and financial security</b>	<b>Building community resilience and capacity</b>
<b>Ensuring economic recovery for all</b>	<b>Health and wellbeing</b>
<b>Digital exclusion</b>	<b>Green issues / Climate Change</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>Children and Young People</b>
<b>Culture and creativity</b>	<b>Barriers to accessing information and support</b>

3.6 It is important to note that the Social Renewal Plan is closely aligned with Renfrewshire’s Economic Recovery Plan – local actions to promote employability, fair work and economic growth are vital levers which will support work to tackle inequality and improve wellbeing.

## **Resources**

3.7 To support delivery of the Social Renewal Plan, Council allocated £2.706m funding in the budget set on 4 March 2021. The funding builds on the significant resources currently being deployed through the Tackling Poverty and Alcohol and Drugs Programmes which play an important role in terms of delivering on the key priorities within the Social Renewal Plan. The funding allocated in March 2021 specifically recognises the ongoing need for the organisation to be able to respond flexibly to the needs of local people and

communities as these emerge over time due to the pandemic. The funding approved in March 2021 also included a number of specific commitments which are currently being progressed by services:

- The allocation of £0.18m of grant funding over a three year period to support the existing Who Cares Communities that Care Project for a further three years.
- £0.250 million will be invested in children's services to enhance current funding available to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, with a specific focus on developing a trauma aware and responsive approach to supporting children, young people and their families.
- £0.200 million to provide direct support, advocacy and representation for private tenants and private landlord enforcement activities, recognising the very challenging time that will be experienced as temporary legal protections for tenants that have operated during COVID-19 transition away.
- £0.200 million to support the roll out of the Imagination Library Project with all of Renfrewshire's children becoming eligible on their 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, recognising the highly valuable impact the pilot project has had with looked after children.
- Providing £0.100 million of funding for Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau to provide independent welfare, employment and redundancy rights advice and advocacy, recognising the significant challenges that are likely to emerge for individuals as the furlough scheme begins to come to an end.
- £0.100 million to provide an uplift for the Discretionary Housing Payment fund recognising the likely increased number of individuals requiring support with their housing costs.
- £0.030 million to allow Children's Services to provide additional support for young carers including respite during the COVID period.

3.8 As agreed by Council, the balance of the funding (£1.646m) will be used to support the wider delivery of the Social Renewal Plan and the priorities agreed by the organisation and its wider partners.

#### **4. Delivering on the Social Renewal Plan**

4.1 Further to the approval of the initial Social Renewal Plan, officers have been working with partners to map out the work that is already going on across Renfrewshire to deliver on the priorities agreed by Council. Some of these programmes of work are highlighted in the diagram below, with a real opportunity to maximise the potential benefits and outcomes that can be achieved from these as we move forward from the pandemic.

Economic Recovery Plan	Employability and Support Programmes	£100m Housing led Regeneration and Renewal programme	Tackling Poverty Programme
Developing Communities programme: - advice services, locality working, CLAD role etc	Social isolation (Strategic Planning Group as lead)	Alcohol and Drugs Change Programme	Climate Change Programme
Future Paisley	Mental Health e.g anxiety, trauma, bereavement	Digital Strategy	Community Wealth building

#### 4.2 In considering what actions the Council and its partners need to take next, it is important to note:

- There are many initiatives and supports which were put into place as an immediate response to impacts of the pandemic. There is now a requirement to move specific initiatives on to a more sustainable footing, whereby the way in which things happen or work becomes part of the day to day business of the Council and its partners;
- There is momentum and learning that partners need to capture and build on before it is lost;
- Initial information from the community impact assessment has highlighted fundamental shifts in the needs of local people and communities, that we need to understand further;
- There is a need to act now to prepare for potential increased requirements for support as the furlough scheme comes to an end with the anticipated impact on employment and income, or as the presumption against household evictions is lifted and action by landlords to recover rent debt puts additional pressure on private tenants;
- The funding committed by Council in March 2021, will allow the organisation to adapt and respond to changes in needs as these emerge over time, and provide the capacity to develop services and supports into the next phase of the pandemic; and
- It is now 10 years on since the publication of the Christie report, and the actions being progressed within the Social Renewal Plan evidence a focus on joined up service delivery and early intervention and prevention, in line with the 4 pillars outlined by Christie.

#### 4.3 A number of gaps have been identified through the initial assessment process, which are now being recommended for targeted action by partners. Funding of £0.665m is being sought to deliver on these actions, which are focused across three themes:

- Income, Poverty and Financial security
- Building resilience and community capacity and
- Digital exclusion

## **Income, Poverty and Financial Insecurity**

- 4.4 The findings of the community impact assessment illustrated the stark impact that pandemic has had on local people, particularly in relation to the income of individuals and families. There is robust evidence that increasing numbers of low-income households are struggling to manage financially and need support with housing, food and fuel costs. Research has shown that more than half of adults in families from the lowest income quintile have borrowed more to cover everyday costs since the pandemic began, while those that entered the crisis with low savings have been the most likely to have run those down during 2020.

### **What are we doing?**

- 4.5 Local organisations have provided vital food and fuel support, often on an emergency basis, and partners have continued to adapt and develop new approaches to meet the needs of local people. In addition to some of the pandemic payments the Council has made on behalf of the Scottish Government in relation to school meals provision or low income, our local Tackling Poverty Programme generated almost £800,000 of additional income for households in 2020/21, with over £10m additional income generated over this period overall by the Council's Advice Works service. The Tackling Poverty programme also continues to fund targeted family support and advice services, as well as breakfast clubs, school day costs and activities for young people through for example the Street Stuff programme.

### **What needs to happen next?**

- 4.6 There are a range of more recent developments which will support local people impacted by low income. Through the Developing Communities workstream within the Council's Right for Renfrewshire transformation programme, work is currently underway to improve the accessibility of advice and support services provided by the Council, linked to a new localities approach.
- 4.7 As set out in section 3, funding was also allocated in the Council's budget in March 2021 to deliver additional support and advocacy for private tenants and in relation to employment advice. These are important issues for the Council and its partners to focus on over the course of the next 6 months in particular.
- 4.8 A number of additional actions have now been identified by partners as a priority to address income, poverty and financial security:
- Whilst recognising that the primary focus of local work with partners must be on increasing income and reducing household costs, the requirement for the provision of emergency food and support with fuel costs will need to continue to be prioritised due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic on low income households. It is now important to work with community groups and organisations to develop models of community food provision which promote dignity and resilience such as

the establishment of food pantries. In addition, there needs to be mechanisms to support community food provision which is highly responsive and localised.

- Further work needs to be undertaken to explore options for the provision of fuel cost support. A pilot will be developed to work with low income households struggling to meet immediate fuel costs, linked to the provision of energy advice.
- Partners will need to refocus efforts to help people access benefits and other sources of income that they are entitled to, through targeted benefit take-up campaigns. This is particularly important given the changing circumstances many people have experienced in terms of factors such as employment and health.
- As household budgets tighten, more people have and will continue to turn to high cost forms of credit, and may be more vulnerable to illegal forms of money-lending. Affordable credit options will need to be developed, expedited and actively promoted by local partners. Credit unions play a vital role in the provision of affordable credit and officers will continue to work with local credit unions and partners on this issue.
- Work will be undertaken to monitor the work being undertaken in other areas of Scotland around Community Access to Cash Pilots, to find solutions to the ongoing impact of closures of local banks and post offices on our high streets and village communities.

4.9 One of the most vital pieces of work which will be undertaken will be to put into place mechanisms by which to engage with low income individuals and families across Renfrewshire. As highlighted above, there is a significant amount of partnership working and services which are already available to support people on low incomes. However concerningly, child poverty rates increased by 1% in Renfrewshire prior to the pandemic, with figures indicating that 18% of children in Renfrewshire are living in poverty (19/20 data).

4.10 This increase coupled with the significant increase in unemployment and people accessing universal credit during 2020 due to the pandemic, there is a real need for partners to develop a much deeper understanding of the issues facing low income households and families. It is important that this engagement is meaningful, and that this is used to shape the next phase of the local Tackling Poverty programme.

4.11 It is recommended that resources are allocated from the Social Renewal funding to:

- Support the establishment of an additional two community pantries in Renfrewshire, including one in Paisley town centre, hosted by RAMH at the Restore superstore on Causeyside Street as well as one in Johnstone town centre, hosted by Active Communities as part of the development of the former Johnstone Police Station into a community health and wellbeing hub. It is recommended that £25,000 of funding is awarded to each organisation to support initial establishment and development costs. In addition, it is proposed that £25,000 is awarded



to develop the existing community pantry in place at Star Project in Shortroods into its next phase.

- Establish a Renfrewshire 'Community Food Fund' which will provide small awards to organisations to develop community food offerings which move from emergency response to promote dignified access to food and community resilience, to be in place ahead of Winter 2021. Funding criteria will be developed for further consideration and approval by elected members.
- Maximise income for low income households through an extensive benefit take-up campaign supported by local advice partners
- Deliver affordable credit options across Renfrewshire which provide alternatives to high cost or illegal credit options.
- Establish longer-term participative approaches for engaging with people on low-incomes to inform Council policy decisions - there are a number of options being explored as part of 'Get Heard' work with Poverty Alliance including online forums and a citizen 'panel'.

### **Building community resilience and capacity**

- 4.12 The community impact assessment highlighted the strength of the community response to the pandemic. Local groups and organisations rallied to meet the needs of local people, identifying new and innovative approaches, and establishing volunteer networks and opportunities. There is an opportunity for the Council to build on the partnerships that have been formed or strengthened during the pandemic, and to embed some of the practices which have been developed into more sustainable arrangements.

#### ***What are we doing?***

- 4.13 In terms of community resilience, the Neighbourhood Hub model which was put into place as part of the initial pandemic response continues to develop with colleagues across the Council and our partners. The hubs operate on a partnership basis with Renfrewshire Leisure, Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), Engage Renfrewshire, local groups and organisations across communities, and are supported by local volunteers. The hub teams have provided support services to over 1,000 households since the start of the lockdown period. Support provided has included signposting to food services, delivering prescriptions, befriending calls to people who feel isolated or vulnerable, and delivery of books and toys through the Libraries Direct Service. The Hubs have supported people through mental health crisis, to access adult social care, the provision of housing and income advice, and have worked largely with people who are not engaged in services and have no support network

#### ***What needs to happen next?***

- 4.14 The neighbourhood hub model, although established to support the COVID-19 response, has demonstrated real outcomes for local people and communities which should now become formally part of the way in which partners work together across Renfrewshire. The hub model supports early intervention and

prevention, and works on the basis that all partners across all sectors can bring skills, expertise and resources to link people to opportunities and options for support within their community. This is the cornerstone of the Developing Communities workstream within the council's Right for Renfrewshire programme, and opportunities have been identified to develop the hub model to align with local partnerships structures and to support work to progress local actions and priorities.

- 4.15 As outlined above, community groups have and will continue to have a significant role in supporting local people through the impacts of the pandemic and will have a critical role in the neighbourhood hub model. As the local partnership approach evolves further, there will be a requirement to consider how best the Council can support both the ongoing development and future sustainability of local community organisations. Work will be undertaken to review existing funding mechanisms and to explore options that may be available at a local and national level to support greater resilience.
- 4.16 The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the devastating impact of isolating people from personal connections and community supports, as well as limiting opportunities for many people to meaningfully participate in their communities and neighbourhoods. This has further strengthened the case for work to support participatory approaches in communities.
- 4.17 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, work was being undertaken to explore a feasibility study into a 'Participatory Scotland' model being developed by Corra Foundation and Participatory City. This model focusses on setting up and enabling opportunities for local people to imagine, develop and test ideas for their local community. These range from community kitchens, gardening in stalled spaces, community bee-keeping and shared child-care, to informal tea and toast drop-in mornings for social interaction. Officers will now develop this model with partners, in order to continue to identify options to support social isolation and loneliness and to encourage connection and participation as restrictions ease.

Recommendations:

- Further to the success of the Neighbourhood Hub model during COVID-19 response, fully embed and develop this model in Renfrewshire.
- Undertake a feasibility study into the Participatory Scotland model in Renfrewshire, alongside Corra Foundation and the Participatory City Foundation.

### **Digital Exclusion**

- 4.18 Within the Community Impact Assessment, the positive benefits that digital access has brought to many households across Renfrewshire were recognised strongly, however for specific groups of people there remain real barriers to access. Digital exclusion can broadly be considered in relation to three main aspects:
- Connectivity

- Access to a device
- Skills and knowledge (including considerations of safety and wellbeing)

### ***What is happening?***

- 4.19 Renfrewshire is making significant strides in terms of connectivity. City Fibre are investing in a 700km network providing Renfrewshire residents and businesses with access to the fastest, most reliable gigabit speed connectivity.
- 4.20 In terms of device access, Renfrewshire Council has continued to support the delivery of the Connecting Scotland Programme which was established by Scottish Government and Scottish Council for Voluntary Services (SCVO) to provide digital connectivity to people in priority categories who did not have a device. A total of 1,590 devices were allocated in 2020/21 to organisations across Renfrewshire to support specific target groups including people shielding/at high clinical risk, families and care experienced young people and elderly and disabled people.
- 4.21 Elected members will recall that the Council's Digital Strategy was approved in 2020, and includes the key Digital Citizen workstream. A key focus of this programme of work is to ensure that partners work together to tackle digital exclusion. In recognition of the local commitment and partnership working, SCVO have selected Renfrewshire as one of 3 or 4 pilot 'places' to begin to understand how place-based solutions to digital inclusion could work. SCVO will provide support to help facilitate these conversations and solutions, drawing on their own expertise and networks, then produce a report that draws out key learning and recommendations that can be used as a template for other areas to adopt a similar approach.

### ***What needs to happen?***

- 4.22 In response to some of the key findings within the Community Impact Assessment several priority actions have been identified:
- Work with partners at a local and national level to identify and secure opportunities for additional digital devices to be available locally to support those most excluded;
  - Develop a volunteering network to ensure people that are most excluded are able to use these devices safely and confidently.
  - Engage further with those groups that have identified as being most excluded and develop new approaches at a local level to support participation.

### **Delivery support**

- 4.23 As set out in section 4.10 above, there is also a requirement to use the work being undertaken to identify potential options for the next phase of the

Tackling Poverty Programme in Renfrewshire. The existing Tackling Poverty Programme is now in a longer-term delivery phase, and following the completion of certain initiatives and the end of allocated funding, existing posts to support the co-ordination and development of the programme are no longer in place. The proposals within this report form a significant programme of work, which will require additional capacity within the organisation to co-ordinate and deliver this programme within the timescales required. Funding of £90,000 is recommended to resource the delivery and co-ordination of the Social Renewal Programme and related poverty initiatives over the next 18 months.

- 4.24 In order to deliver the priority actions that have been identified across these themes, it is recommended that £0.665m is allocated from the Social Renewal funding allocated by Council in March 2021. The breakdown of this funding is as follows:

	Funding required (£)
<b>Income, Poverty and Financial Security</b>	
Community Food provision comprised of:	100,000
<i>a) Award to STAR project - £25,000</i>	
<i>b) Award to Active Communities - £25,000</i>	
<i>c) Award to RAMH - £25,000</i>	
<i>d) Establishment of Community Food fund - £25,000</i>	
Emergency fuel costs and advice	50,000
Affordable credit project and benefit take up campaign	50,000
Engagement with low income groups	75,000
<b>Community resilience and capacity</b>	
Development of neighbourhood hub model	200,000
<b>Digital Exclusion</b>	
Delivery of Digital Citizen Programme	100,000
Programme Co-ordination and support – Tackling Poverty and Social Renewal Programme	90,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>665,000</b>

## 5. Next steps

- 5.1 Elected members are also asked to note that partners have also agreed to continue to work together to listen, engage and respond to the needs of local people and communities, as these emerge in the months ahead. Specific work will be required to explore impacts on particular communities of interest or on particular groups, where these are as of yet not fully clear. Further analysis will continue to be progressed with partners in relation to:

- The impact of disruption to health treatments
- Social isolation and mental health

- Impact on unpaid carers
- Life outcomes for children and young people
- Equalities issues
- Private tenant advice/support

5.2 It is anticipated that a further update for members will be provided on these issues later this year and which may seek additional drawdown of COVID-19 recovery resources to support Renfrewshire's communities.

---

## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the pandemic has had and will continue to have a significant impact on the resources available to the Council. Given the anticipated longer term financial challenges facing the Council, the requirement for targeting of resources in priority areas will be essential. The paper recommends that funding of £0.665m is allocated to support a number of initiatives outlined in Section 4 of this report, which will be drawn from funding set aside in the Council's budget in March 2021.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - the commitment of the Council's workforce since the pandemic emerged has been fundamental to the ability of services to continue to support local people, businesses and communities. A significant proportion of the Council's workforce live locally in Renfrewshire, and many of the social impacts outlined in the report are also being experienced by our employees. Targeted support is being offered to employees in order to address issues such as financial insecurity and mental health and wellbeing.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – There has been a strong partnership response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Renfrewshire with community and third sector organisations working closely together to maximise the resources available at a local level to meet the needs of local people and communities. This will be a critical focus going forward as partners work collectively to mitigate the impact on those most negatively impacted in our communities.
4. **Legal** - New legislative requirements have been put into place by the Scottish Government to support the country's response to COVID-19. There may be further changes to these requirements or further legislation as the lockdown measures ease, which the Council will require to respond to.
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** – none

7. **Equality and Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health and Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none
13. **Climate Risk** – there are climate emergency actions in the attached action plan, aligning this Social Renewal Plan to the Council's commitment to tackling the climate emergency through a green recovery from COVID-19

---

## List of Background Papers

---

**Author:** *Laura McIntyre, Head of Policy and Commissioning*