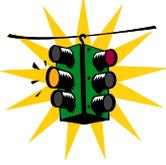




Benefits Highlight Report

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Author:	<i>Fergus Walker</i>	
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Headlines

CRISIS GRANTS

- In the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021 there was 990 applications received in SWF for Crisis Grant support and expenditure in the fund is £25,610. This is a 27% reduction in spend from 2020/2021 during the pandemic. Looking at pre-pandemic data for 2019/2020 over the same period it shows that Crisis Grant application numbers and spend levels this year appear to be returning to 2019/2020 levels.

COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS

- By contrast in the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021 there was 402 applications for Community Care Grants with the value of awards being £254,947. For the same period last year this is an increase of 89% from the £134,804 spent in the early part of the pandemic.
 - Reports show that this increase in spend is in the categories for “Person/Family facing exceptional pressure” and “Fleeing Domestic Violence”. Both of these categories has seen an increase in expenditure of roughly 40% to date.
 - RSL have created 237 new tenancies in the first quarter of 2021/2022 which is far greater than previous years. This is likely to be related to the three month lockdown between March and June 2020. If these volumes are maintained throughout the year then spend will continue to increase in this area. This projection could be conservative as it is expected that another 300 affordable housing properties is expected to become available in the current financial year in Dunbeg.

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS (DHP)

- Spend and committed spend on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund at August 2021 sits at £788,638
- The DHP funding allocation for 2021/22 is £898,799. This includes our full Bedroom Tax funding allocation for 2021/22 and Scottish Government tranche 2 funding this year.

SELF ISOLATION SUPPORT GRANTS

- Self-Isolation Support Grants of £500 are being administered by the Scottish Welfare Fund team. From April 2021 to August 2021 the Council received 584 applications for support and paid out on 185 occasions awarding £92,500 in total. This is much higher than volumes between October 2020 and March 2021.



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Volumes in September are increasing further which is of concern for existing staffing levels. We are now really struggling to process these grants on top of all other works. A recruitment drive was carried out and a new staff member should be in place to assist shortly.

ARGYLL AND BUTE FLEXIBLE FOOD FUND (ABFFF)

- The **Argyll and Bute Flexible Food Fund** has been shortlisted with 4 other UK local authorities for an IRRV (Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation) Excellence Award in the category Innovation (Service Delivery). This is a significant achievement there was an excellent response to the IRRV performance awards this year much greater than previous years so to make the final 5 in this category is excellent. The Council hosted a virtual inspection by the IRRV Chief Executive and another senior colleague on Friday 3 September. The presentation delivered to the panel is attached for information.
- As at 31 August the project, that has supported 587 families who are suffering from food and fuel insecurities in Argyll and Bute, has a combined client gain of £844,696, thus the average client gain per household is £1,439. The project has been extended to 31 March 2022 and a series of roadshows are being rolled out across Argyll and Bute starting 24 and 25 August in Islay and Jura. The majority of Argyll and Bute will be covered by roadshows by November 2021.

POVERTY TRAINING/SCHOOL CLOTHING BANKS

- Anti-poverty awareness training. An ITT (Invitation to Tender) is currently displayed on Scotland Excel with regard to the provision of overarching training for staff of the Council and key community planning partners. We hope to train are 600 staff by the end of March 2022.
- **School Clothing Bank** – this clothing bank will be based on reuse and sustainability rather than the purchase and delivery of new items. To include Primary and Secondary education. Useful discussions have taken place with;
 - the Helensburgh HUB (Uniform Bank) which is run by the Helensburgh Parish Church and is an already established and well run clothing bank in Helensburgh and Lomond
 - Dunoon Burgh Hall and Dunoon foodbank in Dunoon
 - Inspiralba, South Kintyre Development Trust and Kintyre Recycling in Campbeltown
 - Fyne Futures and Bute Oasis in Rothesay
- All appear to be keen to support an Argyll and Bute wide clothing bank model.
- Next stage is to speak to the schools in these areas and try to establish the School Clothing Banks in these areas by March 2022.
- Oban, Lochgilphead, Tarbert and the Islands will be picked up in the next financial year. The vision is that no child in any part of Argyll and Bute should feel that they are not wearing the right clothing for school.

FERGUS WALKER

20 SEPTEMBER 2021