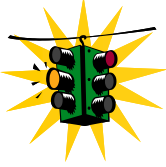




## Benefits Highlight Report

|                         |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Name of Document:       | Highlight Report -<br><b><i>Benefits Highlight Report</i></b> | Overall Project Status<br><br><br><b>GREEN</b> |
| Author:                 | <i>Fergus Walker</i>  |   |
| Description of Content: | To 31 July 2023   |   |
| Distribution:           | <i>Financial Inclusion and Advice Group</i>                   |   |

### Headlines

#### CRISIS GRANTS

- In the period 1 April 2023 to 31 July 2023 there were 422 applications received in SWF for Crisis Grant support. 224 awards have been made to the value of £23,219. This is a still a slight reduction on applications for this time last year however spend is up by 5%. We are continuing to closely monitor application numbers.

#### COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS

- In the period 1 April 2023 to 31 July 23 there was 270 applications for Community Care Grants. 132 awards have been made to the value of £173,293. Again this represents a slight decrease in applications but spend is up by 27%. At the end of July 40 CCG applications were outstanding.
- Scottish Government have advised that the Council will receive £458,284 of programme funding for SWF in 2023/2043.

#### DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS (DHP)

- As at 30 July 2023 our spent and committed amount on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund is £767,472.
- Initial DHP Tranche 1 funding allocation for 2023/24 in Argyll and Bute is £869,638. With expected Tranche 2 funding of £192,259 due later in the year. This brings our total DHP allocation to £1,061,897 for the year.
- Allocations are split into Bedroom Tax - £721,265, Other DHPs - £100,602 and Benefit Cap - £47,771

#### ARGYLL AND BUTE FLEXIBLE FOOD and FUEL FUND (ABFFFF)

- Since January 2021 the project has supported 1,994 households who are suffering from food and fuel insecurities in Argyll and Bute, with a combined client gain of £2,725,957 which is an average gain of £1,367 per household.
- The biggest support continues to be with disability related benefits PIP/DLA that have gone unclaimed. With UC, HB, DHP and Scottish Government Grants making up a significant amount. Everyone seen by an Adviser at BAC is offered a referral to Alienergy. They have supported clients in Debt Relief, Fuel Vouchers, Appliances and Efficiency Measures.



# Benefits Highlight Report

- The project has recently been gained national acclaim winning an award in the Community Focus Award at the annual ASSISTFM conference in Glasgow.
- The project features as a case study/exemplar in the Scottish Government’s national Action Plan ‘Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks in Scotland’ which was published in May 2023.
- Work is underway to expand the project to offer more support to the gypsy traveller community and we are also looking at the possibility of outreach.

## Case Study

- *A travelling community family who are being supported by MECOPP were offered support under the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund. The family have been given a full benefits check to ensure that all benefits are claimed. A third trench of FFFF is being awarded alongside the Laser funding of £200. This funding will really help over the summer holidays as this is a particularly challenging time for families on a restricted income. This will allow for some family day trips.*

## SCHOOL CLOTHING BANKS

- The project is now live in the Kintyre area, Dunoon and Cowal, Bute and Oban Lorn and the Islands. Work continues to introduce the project in Mid Argyll and the Islands. Many schools in the area have a supply of preloved uniforms or are working with other organisations who can support families in need of uniforms. We are trying to work with community development officer and the schools to find a way to bring everything together and make requests for uniforms as easy as possible for families.
- [School uniform scheme \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](http://argyll-bute.gov.uk)

## EBSS and APF Grants

- The Council Tax team are currently processing applications from customers for the Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS) and Alternative Payment Fund (APF) on behalf of the UK government. These schemes have now closed, they were aimed at people who do not have a direct relationship with an energy supplier and therefore hadn’t benefitted from the £400 grant that reduces energy bills or the £200 for those using oil or gas central heating. As volumes of applications had not been as high as expected across the UK and we had experience the same here in Argyll and Bute, we contacted all care homes in our area to encourage take up of the scheme. This resulted in a good number of extra applications before the scheme closed on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023. Any final applications will be sent to local authorities by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> August, payments must be made by 23<sup>rd</sup> August and the scheme ends on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023.
- The table below shows the current position with both schemes;

| SCHEME     | NO. OF APPS | AWARDS     |                | REJECTIONS | TO BE PROCESSED |
|------------|-------------|------------|----------------|------------|-----------------|
|            |             | No.        | Value (£)      |            |                 |
| EBSS(£400) | 221         | 213        | 85,200         | 8          | 0               |
| EPG(£200)  | 357         | 349        | 69,800         | 8          | 0               |
|            | <b>578</b>  | <b>562</b> | <b>155,000</b> | <b>16</b>  | <b>0</b>        |



## Benefits Highlight Report

### Current Issues/Risks (in your area and across partners)

| CURRENT ISSUES / RISKS |             |      |     |                             |       |
|------------------------|-------------|------|-----|-----------------------------|-------|
| ID                     | Description | Prob | Imp | Action / Progress /Timeline | Trend |
| 1                      |             |      |     |                             |       |
|                        |             |      |     |                             |       |

### Current Initiatives/developments (in your area and across partners)

| ID | Description           | Action / Progress /Timeline |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1  | School Clothing Banks | Complete by December 2023   |
|    |                       |                             |

### Horizon scanning (e.g. future legislative changes / opportunities or developments)

- Possible partnership working with the Poverty Alliance on the rural poverty premium

### Key actions – 3 month horizon

- Continue to monitor progress with AB FFFF and other schemes.
- Monitor DHP and CCG spend against budget.
- Continue progressing our School Clothing Banks project.

**FERGUS WALKER**

**15 August 2023**