



2022-2023 :::::.....

Argyll & Bute Child Poverty *Action Plan Review*



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Foreword

Welcome to the fourth review of the Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan. It has been a challenging year that has seen us still dealing with the ongoing impacts of the Covid19 Pandemic and exit from the European Union. As well, sadly the war in Ukraine continues and we are facing a cost of living crisis and the highest rate of inflation in 40 years. Through all of this it remains vital to continue to tackle poverty and its impacts on our children, young people and families.

Our outgoing Children and Young People's Commissioner, Bruce Adamson, said that "Poverty is a right to life issue". In a time where some parents are having to make decisions about whether to heat their homes or put food on the table, never has this been truer. 2023 will see the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child become a part of Scots Law and we welcome this and the focus it will bring to ensuring that children are listened to, their rights respected and importantly in terms of child poverty, their right to life, survival and development (Article 6).

We also welcome SNAP 2: Scotland's Second National Human Rights Action Plan (2023-2030). This sets out a series of priorities and first amongst these is to "Achieve a decent standard of living." It goes on to say:

Poverty is a human rights issue that engages many human rights standards that are interdependent and interrelated. This includes – but isn't limited to – equality and non-discrimination, the right to an adequate standard of living, food, housing, social security, health, work, education, participation, private and family life.

We recognise this and commit to taking a rights approach to tackling poverty and its impacts. We have already done this in our training of staff on child poverty and we are looking at developing data systems that identify where we can focus our supports whilst respecting the rights and dignity of people. We will work to ensure that there is co-production on key strategies and decisions. A great example of this is the development of our new Local Outcome Improvement Plan where we have co-produced extensively, including with 40 community groups, schools and 18 youth groups amongst others. We also provided accessible information that allowed a wide range of people to participate, for example those with disability or from marginalised groups. Over 1,900 people responded across Argyll and Bute and told us that their priorities were transport infrastructure, housing and community wellbeing with financial inclusion the 4th selected.

People experience poverty through no fault of their own and we know that it can be harder for single parent families, larger families, young families, families where there is a disability and for some ethnic minority families. As well in Argyll and Bute our people who live in remote, rural and island places, face extra challenges with fuel, food and transport costing more and childcare sometimes being more difficult to access.

We will continue to work together to find ways of tackling these challenges and make things better for everyone. This report is about some of the ways we are trying to achieve this and we would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our staff whose hard work and dedication make them possible.

As well, communities, individuals and third sector organisations have all played a part in supporting those impacted on by the cost of living crisis and welcoming refugees from Ukraine and other parts of the world; thank you all. Argyll and Bute may be beautiful but it is our people who make it a great place to live.



Introduction

2022 - 2023 has seen a crucial need to tackle a cost of living crisis that has seen more families thrown into poverty. Inflation in the UK has risen to its highest rate for 40 years and put pressure on families who are struggling to meet the ever rising costs of basics like fuel, food and housing.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (The links between housing and poverty an evidence review" by Turnstall for JRF 2013) concluded that Scotland had kept its poverty rate lower than other parts of the UK due to having greater access to affordable social housing. The report found that poverty levels before housing costs were similar in Scotland and England, but once housing costs have been factored in, there is a decrease in poverty rates. This view is supported by the Resolution Foundation, which state.

"Scotland has been the part of the UK with the lowest child poverty ratereflecting the fact that Scotland enjoys relatively high earnings but without the same degree of housing cost pressure."

The laws of supply and demand dictate that a lack of housing supply will result in higher house prices and rents. Housing is often a family's most significant monthly expense, so affordable rent can substantially impact poverty figures.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report stated that the difference in rates between Scotland was not only having lower rents in the social rented sector than the rest of the UK, but also a higher proportion of social rented properties. The report concluded that continued support for increasing the stock of social rented housing is likely to be a significant factor in preventing the incidence of poverty from rising in Scotland. As well poverty in Scotland has been reduced by a number of key Social Security Benefits, particularly the Scottish Child Payment. This weekly payment of £25 for each child under the age of 16-years has helped to keep many families out of poverty.

Research has found that in remote rural and island communities, high property prices coupled with an additional minimum living cost of 15-30% can prevent the recruitment and retention of staff, especially those on lower levels of pay such as child-care workers. This can result in crucial child development services such as wrap-around child-care or nursery provision being unavailable or only available in distant locations. Quality early year's provision is vital to lift children out of poverty, so if children are denied these services, the cycle of poverty is unlikely to be broken.

In addition, Public Health Scotland and other bodies have pointed to health issues caused by poverty and disadvantage. New research by the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow revealed "stark and concerning data" - including that children in deprived areas are 2.6 times as likely to die in their first 12 months as children in less deprived areas.

Children born into poverty are more likely to experience a wide range of health problems – including poor nutrition, chronic disease and mental health problems – than those born into affluent families.

Child Poverty in Scotland: health impact and health inequalities. NHS Health Scotland, 2018

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that:

There is evidence that suggests low incomes are associated with potential symptoms of anxiety, such as lack of sleep, lacking energy and feelings of depression. For children, even at a young age, there is a gap in young people's educational attainment by parental income level, and this continues throughout the different stages of a child's education. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has generally widened the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged pupils in the UK, with reasons for this including the digital divide, home learning environments and falling incomes.

2021/22		Most deprived 20% of areas (%)	Least deprived 20% of areas (%)	Attainment gap
Aged 11	Percentage of primary 7 achieving literacy	56	80	24 percentage points
	Percentage of primary 7 achieving numeracy	62	85	23 percentage points
Aged 16-18	One or more at SCQF at level five on leaving school	78	96	18 percentage points

UK Poverty 2023: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; 26th January 2023

In Argyll and Bute a Cost of Living Crisis Group has been bringing the Council and its partners together to share and coordinate support efforts and come up with strategies to tackle poverty and its impacts. Coordinated local efforts are key to recognising and combatting the particular challenges posed by our area. These include a relatively small and aging population that is spread over a large geographical area that encompasses 5 towns, many remote, rural areas and 23 inhabited islands. Employment is largely within sectors such as tourism and hospitality, which are traditionally low paid and seasonal. Argyll and Bute, whilst it has a high proportion of its population employed and many self-employed, lacks an industrial base and the Council and Health Board are amongst the biggest employers.

Gross weekly wages are lower than the Scottish national average and the gender pay gap remains an issue.

Earnings by Place of Residence (2022)

Gross Weekly Pay	Argyll & Bute (Pounds)	Scotland	Great Britain
Full Time Workers	586.3	640.3	642.2
Male Full Time Workers	636.9	675.1	687.5
Female Full Time Workers	552.1	604.7	584.5

Hourly Pay Excluding Overtime	Argyll & Bute (Pounds)	Scotland	Great Britain
Full Time Workers	14.98	16.59	16.37
Male Full Time Workers	15.51	16.91	16.97
Female Full Time Workers	14.48	16.29	15.49

All of this means that to address child poverty in the long term, employability measures and encouraging business growth is key, as is the need for the Scottish Government to recognise the particular challenges faced by remote, rural and island places and to offer these local authorities appropriate targeted supports.

Reason for the Review

In 2017 the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act came into force as an attempt to put in place measures that would reduce the concerning increase in child poverty, both on a national and local level. The Act also introduced a new requirement for local authorities and each relevant Health Board to jointly prepare a Local Child Poverty Action Report, as soon as practicable after the end of each reporting year.

The 2017 Act set four targets relating to ending child poverty, which the Scottish Government committed to trying to achieve by 2023 and 2030; these are all measured after housing costs are deducted. The targets for 2023 - 2024 are:

- Less than 18% of children are in relative poverty;
- Less than 14% of children are in absolute poverty;
- Less than 8% of children are in combined low income and material deprivation;
- Less than 8% of children are in persistent poverty.

Targets for 2030 are:

- less than 10% of children live in relative poverty (relative poverty is less than 60% of average household income for the year taking account of the size and composition of the household);
- less than 5% of children live in absolute poverty (absolute poverty is less than 60% of average household income for the financial year beginning 1 April 2010);
- less than 5% of children live in combined low income and material deprivation (low income is defined as less than 70% of average household income for the year, material deprivation is when families are unable to afford three or more items out of a list of basic necessities);
- less than 5% of children live in persistent poverty (persistent poverty is where a child has lived in relative poverty for three out of the last four years).

With the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic and exiting the European Union still with us, the cost of living crisis deepening and the war in Ukraine continuing, it is clear that it is becoming ever harder to reach the targets or indeed set out plans to keep on this path. April 2022 saw the greatest fall in the value of the basic rate of unemployment benefits since 1972, when annual uprating began and, as the cost of living has continued to rise throughout 2022, the real term purchasing power of households receiving these benefits has continued to fall.

Scotland does have a lower rate of poverty (18%) than England (22%) and Wales (24%) and around the same rate as Northern Ireland (17%).

Our Vision

This review is also where we in Argyll and Bute show what actions we are taking to tackle child poverty and how well we work together to achieve our vision of no children living in households affected by poverty and deprivation.

We want an Argyll and Bute where no-one lives in poverty. Everyone should be able to achieve their potential and feel healthy, happy and valued. We want to be a place where everyone understands that tackling poverty is a shared responsibility. We believe that if we act locally, and in partnership, we can make a difference.

Engagement and Listening

It is important to listen to what people are saying about our services and efforts to tackle child poverty and other key issues; without this we are simply telling people what we think is best for them. Article 12 of the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right needs to be at the heart of everything we do, our Child Poverty Action Plans, Children's Services Plans and Local Outcome Improvement Plans. Some of what we do can be termed co production and can be defined as:

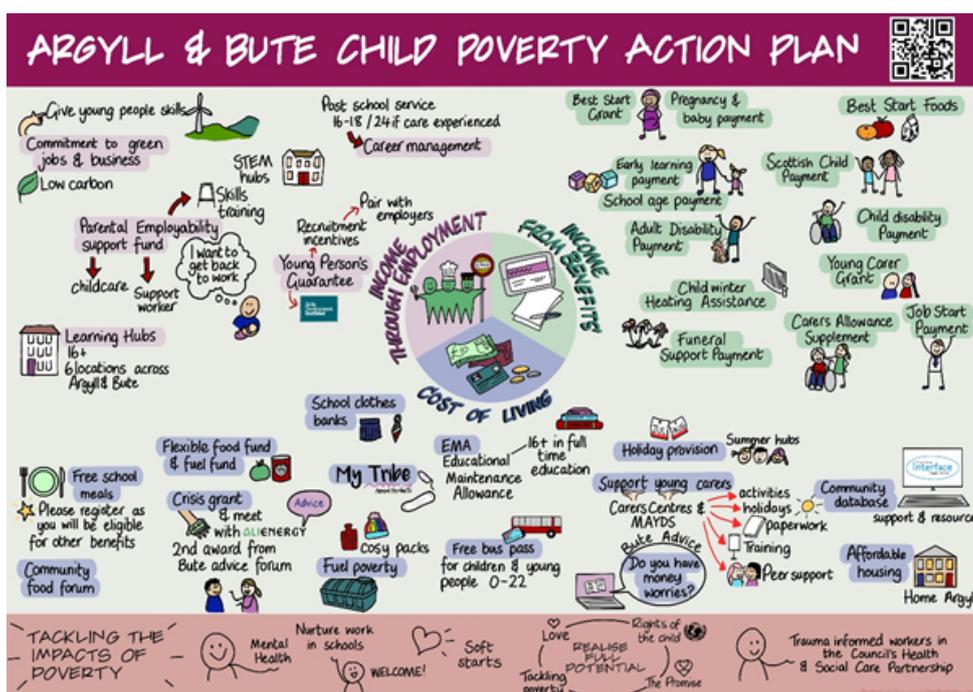
The process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not 'in' the same organization

Ostrom, Elinor. 1996. Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development. World Development 24(6): 1073–87. (1996, 1073).

Sometimes this is not always possible, where for example there are limited resources and what needs to happen (services or benefits being delivered in a certain way) is determined by those other than the people who will be delivering the service. For example we can ask pupils how they would like maths taught and we can perhaps use some of their ideas but what ultimately is put in place is determined to a greater degree by what the curriculum says needs to be taught.

Other things that might get in the way, or be a challenge to coproduction, include: resources, competing demands, geography and demography. In Argyll and Bute we have a relatively small and ageing population set over a large geographical area that includes many island and rural places. Many key policies and plans are seeking voices and views of people impacted by them and there is the risk of repeatedly going back to the same young people, groups and communities for their views and causing overload. We and other local authorities are on a learning journey; how best to engage and involve whilst keeping it meaningful, enjoyable and real, particularly for children and young people.

This year there has been considerable engagement and coproduction for our Children's Service Plan, LOIP and for individual services, like the Council's Welfare Rights Service. With Child Poverty we continue to engage with children and young people and others using our Plan on a Page and this is going well. We hope to do more in the coming year.





Increasing Demands for benefit checks and Advice Services - The Council's Welfare rights Service also noted increased number of referrals for benefit checks and income maximisation. It is clear many clients are experiencing hardship due to the cost of living crisis with fuel costs being a major factor. In many cases clients have all the benefits they are entitled to in place and the only option is to refer on to other support agencies. This is reflected in the experiences of other members including: Benefits; Bute Advice Centre; ABCAB; Allenergy; Home Energy Scotland; Carr Gomm; Fyne Homes Housing Association, Dunbritten Housing Association; Debt Counselling and Warm and Well Argyll and Bute.

Fuel costs in remote, rural and island places are a particular problem with no mains gas being available and LPG and other options having to be used. Most islands also lack wood and similar options and these require to be transported over from the mainland.

Community Food Forum members are seeing more families with children presenting and fuel costs being a particular issue. They continue to receive crisis enquiries from people in fuel poverty. They are particularly seeing people with electric storage heating which is expensive to run. The Scottish Government has given the Council £197,000 to support people on the islands. From this, grant payments of £5,000 to each of 4 island based foodbank organisations to support their work.

Actions Taken to Support People

Warm Places Initiative – A wide range of organisations across Argyll and Bute have coordinated their efforts and produced “warm places” that provide warmth, snacks, company and advice and activities. A guide has been produced and widely circulated through the media and other resources.

<https://www.argylltsi.org/warmspaces.html>

Flexible Food and Fuel Fund - This fund combines grants with advice services. If granted, monies are given for food and fuel; if service users consent to accept advice services input, from the Bute Advice Centre and Allenergy, they can be considered for a further grant. From 14 January 2021 to 31 December 22 the project, has supported 1,627 households who are suffering from food and fuel insecurities in Argyll and Bute, with a combined client gain of £2,353,670. Bute Advice Centre and Allenergy continue to work hard in locating those who could benefit from the funding and look forward to rolling out the project in the next two financial years.

Housing - They continue to work with Mecopp and the Gypsy Travelling communities. Contacts have been made to ensure that these communities are aware of the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund.

A total of £555K spent on delivering energy efficiency improvements to 55 properties. In addition funding has been secured to work in partnership with ACHA to insulate mixed tenure properties and work has started in Cowal.

COVID Tenant Rent Arrears Fund assisted 70 households with rent arrears at a total cost of around £91K. Council has now spent all this funding. There is still the Rent Arrears Fund around Rapid Rehousing that can help with rent arrears.

Community Food Forum - In the recent months more families with children have been presenting. They continue to receive crisis enquiries from people in fuel poverty – some are old clients and some are new who are seeing a rise in their energy prices.

The Parental Welfare Fund - This is a new initiative the Employability Team have launched and is being delivered through Inspiralba. It is intended to help with the transition to work and alleviate any worries. Up to £1,000 is available in 3 stages to help with childcare costs, existing debts, transport costs, clothes for work and buying coffees or lunches.

Parental Employment Support Fund / Spark Your Promise - Many clients are struggling to focus on work when they have very real critical problems such as their children needing winter coats, no access to broadband, rent arrears etc. A bespoke package is available to support each client.

Welfare Rights Officers - have since the start of the new financial year to the 28th February 2023 dealt with 1162 tenants, bringing in an annual amount to date of £3.3m.

ACHA Welfare Rights (Argyll Community Housing Association) - There continues to be a large amount of Attendance Allowance applications with reflects the aging population and a lot of clients looking for help applying for Adult Disability Payment. Warm Packs - Over £10,000 raised from contractors and consultants to buy warm packs that have a thermal blanket, gloves, hat and socks, hot water bottle, thermal mug and some soup to help keep warm. These are in ACHA offices and vans and cars of staff too. This has proved to be very helpful for tenants and a large number have been given out.

Benefits - Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants - between 1 April 2022 and 31 January 2023 there were 701 awards paid out to the value of £65K. 13% increase for the same period last year and a 30% increase in spend. 192 applications in January 2023 which is the highest number we have ever had.

Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grants – between 1 April 2022 and 31 January 2023 there were 775 applications and 365 awards paid out to the value of £443K – this is an increase of £35K. Energy Bill Support Scheme - £530K funding from the UK Government – Council Tax Section will be making the payments and 66 applications were received on the first day.

When applications are made for the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund, applicants are also matched against entitlement for other grants for consideration. Where people are claiming Council Tax Reduction and do not appear to be claiming other grants that they may be entitled to, they are contacted to make them aware of this. People are reminded through Schools, media posts etc. that even though their child may automatically now be getting free school meals as a universal offering, they should still put in their application as it makes them eligible for other benefits.

Discretionary Housing Payments – as at 31 January 2023 spent and committed £760K out of a budget of £961K. The Council have a duty to pay DHPs to anyone on the benefit cap and looking at ways to automate DHP awards. As there is no Universal Credit data for Housing costs, need, is identified on application for this.

Scotland Loves Local Cards – cards to the value of £120 were issued in late November and as at 14 February 85.2% of cards have been activated with £680K spent in local areas.

Support for cost of living on Islands – Scottish Government have given £197,000 to the council to support people on the islands. Approx. 1,300 Scotland Loves Local Gift cards have been issued to islanders in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. £1.60 top up payments daily payments have also been issued to pupils in receipt of Free School Meals.

School Clothing Banks - Now live in the majority of the Argyll and Bute area. New web page is up and running with links to application forms. Still need to get the project set up in Mid Argyll and the Islands but expect to have this completed by the new school year. In promoting this initiative emphasis is placed on the benefits of recycling and protecting the planet.

Community Development - Argyll and Bute Supporting Communities Fund is open to community organisations to apply for up to £2,500 to support community projects and can be used to help tackle poverty. Applications closed on 30 March 2023.

Funding Alerts - A monthly Funding Alerts Bulletin is issued to allow communities, individuals and organisations to see what funding supports are available and can be applied for.

Schools - Webinar took place to increase awareness of the My Tribe initiative and the work the Grab Trust is doing to ensure period products are available to all.

Regular communications via schools is taking place to promote Free Bus Travel. Options are being explored to look at a new way to manage the NEC and increase engagement

Data sources that we currently use tell us a great deal about the current situation in terms of poverty in Argyll and Bute, allowing us to look at changes. It can tell us about employment levels:

Employment and Unemployment (Oct.2021 - Sept. 2022)

All People	Argyll & Bute	Argyll & Bute %	Scotland %
Economically Active	40,600	78.6	77.2
In Employment	40,300	78	74.5
Employees	34,000	67.8	66.5
Self Employed	6,000	9.9	7.7
Unemployed	1,200	2.9	3.4

NOMIS

During the period Oct 2021 to September 2022, data advised 2.9% of Argyll & Bute's population are unemployed with national data for Scotland of 3.4%.

Number of workless households:

	Argyll & Bute	Scotland %
Number of Workless Households	2,900	329,200
% of Households that are Workless	13.5	18.6
Number of Children in Workless Households	?	102,400
% of Children in Workless Households	?	12

NOMIS

It can tell us the age of claimant:

Claimants by Age – Not Seasonally Adjusted (January 2023)

Age	Argyll & Bute	Argyll & Bute %	Scotland %	UK %
16+	1,425	2.9	3.2	3.6
16 - 17	10	0.6	0.5	0.2
18 - 24	225	3.5	4.2	4.7
18 -25	115	3.2	4.4	4.7
25 - 49	730	3.3	3.7	4.1
50+	460	2.2	2.3	2.7

It can tell us where those claimants are:

At November 2022 Argyll & Bute Households on Universal Credit by ward; for example

Job Centre	Single, with children	Couple, with children
Campbeltown	197	104
Dunoon	304	116
Helensburgh	316	106
Oban	455	182
Rothesay	157	74

Note. Data Source, Job Centre locations in Argyll & Bute

And how many children are in families:

Numbers of Households in Argyll & Bute in receipt of Universal Credit at November 2022

Job Centre	No children Age 0-4	1 child Age 0-4	2 children Age 0-4	3 or more children Age 0-4	Households without children
Campbeltown	182	98	15	6	474
Dunoon	267	120	34	5	659
Helensburgh	253	140	25	0	617
Oban	364	212	58	0	894
Rothsay	131	74	25	0	385
Total	1197	644	157	11	3029

Note. Data Source, Job Centre locations in Argyll & Bute

It can also tell us about child poverty levels:

On 5th of June 2023, the End Child Poverty Coalition published the latest local child poverty figures. Their research, covering the period 2021–2022, provides the best available estimates of child poverty at the local authority level (below 60% of the median income after housing costs).

Argyll and Bute children in poverty (after housing costs)

Date	Percentage of Children in Poverty	Percentage Point Change
2014 - 2015	20.7%	
2020 - 2021	18.9%	-1.8%
2021 - 2022	21.7%	+2.8%

Argyll and Bute - Children in Absolute Low Income 2021 / 2022

Absolute low-income is defined as a family whose equivalised income is below 60 per cent of the 2010/11 median income adjusted for inflation. Gross income measure is Before Housing Costs (BHC) and includes contributions from earnings, state support and pensions.

Income is equivalised to adjust for household size and family composition

Children aged 0-4	Loner Parents	Couple
Not in working families	101	62
In working families	128	194
Children aged 5 - 10		
Not in working families	100	54
In working families	184	279
Children aged 11-15		
Not in working families	84	65
In working families	225	230
Children aged 16 -19		
Not in working families	53	34
In working families	153	141

Source –
Department of Work and Pensions

In January 2023 1425 (2.8%) of 16 year olds were claiming Out of Work Benefits, lower than the National average in Scotland of 3.2%. Out of Work Benefits in Argyll and Bute have been reported as lower than the Scottish National average with the exception of 16-17 year olds which is marginally higher.

All of the data referred to above is sourced from outside of the council. What it is less good at is telling us how we can identify families who are in immediate need and how we can target our resources to assist them. How do we know if they are claiming all the benefits and supports to which they are entitled to?

The Council is carrying out a project to look at innovative data use to identify unmet need in communities. The project will seek to use Microsoft Power BI to develop better ways of interconnecting data sources, from both inside and outside of the Council, in order to highlight areas of unmet need whilst ensuring that appropriate information governance is maintained, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) are followed, etc. An intended benefit of using PowerBI for this purpose is to allow a large proportion of the report generation process to be automated so that reports can be run and checked more frequently without increasing the reporting burden on council teams. Whilst developing this they will work with the Improvement Service and the Rural and Island Child Poverty Leads Peer Support Network to share ideas and best practice with other local authorities on the same journey. A crucial challenge for the project is deciding whether to:

- a) Use data at household level so as to guide very targeted interventions, or
- b) Use data which has been aggregated, for example at school catchment or 2011 Census Output Area

The council has begun by exploring option (b) since it runs less risk of breaching acceptable practice on information governance. However to obtain improved outcomes option (a) would be preferred, although this option has greater information governance challenges. To explore these options a meeting is also planned with SAVVI (Scalable Approach to Vulnerability via Interoperability) to see if their approach to information governance might add value to the project.

Currently the project is exploring cross-referencing data sets including Council Tax Arrears Recovery Activity, Council Tax Reduction Claims and Scottish Welfare Fund Claims on a postcode and school catchment level. This should identify areas where people are under- claiming benefits and allow the Council's Welfare Rights Teams to offer advice and support by going into schools, community halls, or through other forms of engagement offer benefits advice. The same method will allow for the tracking of the expected improved benefits uptake as a consequence of these activities over time. Other data may also prove useful for this model, including school clothing grant uptake. The model can be used to combine data sets to achieve other objectives that are not specifically linked to meeting unmet need.

It is hoped that this data approach improves outcomes for our communities by ensuring that families receive all the benefits and advice they are entitled to and that this is achieved in a way that respects the privacy of individuals and families; advice and support will be offered to all in targeted school catchments and in terms of a general benefits and entitlement check.

Children and Young People's Service Plan 2023 – 2026

We want Argyll and Bute to be the best place in Scotland to grow up. The Argyll and Bute 2023–26 children and young people's service plan builds on previous plans and was developed by listening to and understanding the needs of our children, young people, and families.

This plan continues our focus on promoting children and young people's wellbeing, underpinned by Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), and extends this by developing our trauma informed workforce, ensuring we embed UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), tackling child poverty and The Promise at the core of everything we do.

Our vision aligns with our aim of making Argyll and Bute the best place to grow up by:

- Providing a good quality of life, including good mental and physical wellbeing;
- Delivering high-quality universal services for everyone;
- Delivering better targeted services for vulnerable children;
- Respecting, protecting, and fulfilling children's and young people's rights;
- Tackling child poverty and inequality;
- Supporting family wellbeing;
- Understanding and addressing the influence of trauma and adverse childhood experiences;
- Improving outcomes for children, young people, and adults who have been in care.

We have fully committed to the promise made to Scotland's infants, children, young people, adults, and families. By 2030, we will transform our care system and the values around which it operates. Ensuring we uphold safe, loving relationships that are important to children and young people and that we continue the transformation of our community services to make sure more children are supported to stay safely with their families. Integral to this plan is building upon and embedding our commitment to the priorities and values of the Promise.

CYPSP 2023–2026 Priorities

Our CYPSP priorities are underpinned by GIRFEC and supported by several key delivery plans and performance measures.

- Young people are encouraged to maintain a healthy weight and increase their physical activity.
- Families are aided and directed to ensure that welfare benefits, Healthy Start vitamins, and vouchers are utilised.
- Preschool children meet their developmental milestones before starting school.
- Children and families are provided with effective support to maximise income and help reduce the adverse impacts of growing up in poverty.
- Children and young people are supported to make informed choices about sexual health.
- Partners work together and actively seek out and listen to the views and experiences of children, young people, and their families. The feedback shows key areas for improvement to ensure that their health and well-being requirements are met.
- Partners collaborate to develop and sustain breastfeeding communities in their communities.

Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan (ABOIP)

Argyll and Bute is currently developing its next Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) which will be a ten year plan running from 2024 to 2034. Co-production is very much at the heart of this and children and young people have been one of the groups who have been engaged with across Argyll and Bute in an attempt to hear the “lesser heard voices”. Local members of the Scottish Youth Parliament are a part of the Community Planning Partnership Management Committee that is leading this development and they helped to advise on ways to make materials and methods user friendly for a younger age group. A group supporting young people with a disability worked with the Community Development Team to adapt the consultation to be suitable for them. 18 youth groups were contacted and there was a high level of response to requests to engage using a pictographic survey form. Schools also took part.

Key to the engagement has been the desire to get participation that reflects the demographic and geographic features that make up our area. This saw over 40 community groups supported to participate and forms being translated into Gaelic and Ukrainian. Sessions included approximately 520 individuals. In addition, support was also focused on non-digital participants as identified by Connecting Scotland; these included:

- Low income households,
- People aged 60+,
- Disabled people,
- People in areas with poor/no connectivity,
- Those without essential digital skills.

Other, often low response groups, were another focus and included males and men’s sheds and men’s mental health groups were contacted. Launched on 5th December 2022, the consultation ended on 31st March 2023 and there were over 1978 participants. Participants were asked to give their views and to consider 7 themes and choose 3 which they thought should be the top priorities in the plan; they could also choose to add their own 3 choices.

The 7 themes suggested were:

- Climate Change;
- Community Wellbeing;
- Digital Inclusion;
- Diverse Economy and Skilled Workforce;
- Financial Inclusion;
- Housing;
- Transport Infrastructure

Overall, the top 3 priorities chosen from the 1,978 participants were:

- Transport Infrastructure,
- Housing,
- Community Wellbeing

Financial Inclusion was the 4th most chosen priority although it is interesting to note that it was in the top three for certain groups or areas:

- Helensburgh and Lomond;
- 0 - 34 and 85+ age groups;
- Those with a high impact disability;

Next steps for the development of the Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan will be a series of focus groups. So far almost 800 people have indicated that they would be willing to take part in these.

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish parliament on 16th of March 2021 but could not be made law because of a legal challenge brought by UK Government Law Officers. The Supreme Court ruled that certain parts of the Bill fell out with the competence of the Scottish Parliament and it was therefore reviewed by the Scottish parliament. It is anticipated that it will now be made law at some point in 2023.

What will this mean?

- Public authorities will not be allowed to act in a way which is incompatible with the UNCRC requirements.
- Children, young people, and their representatives will have the power to go to court to enforce their rights.
- Courts will have powers to decide if legislation is compatible with the UNCRC requirements.
- Existing legislation will have to be read in a way which is compatible with the UNCRC requirements wherever possible.
- Scottish Government will be able to change laws to make sure they are compatible with the UNCRC requirements.
- The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland and Scottish Human Rights Commission will have powers to take legal action to protect children's rights.
- Scottish Government will have to publish a Children's Rights Scheme to show how it is meeting the UNCRC requirements and explain its future plans to progress children's rights.
- Scottish Government will have to review how the Children's Rights Scheme is working each year.
- Other authorities listed in the Bill will have to report every three years on what they are doing to meet the UNCRC requirements. This will include local authorities.

In Argyll and Bute a multiagency, Council led group has been formed to develop an action plan to take forward the implementation of the UNCRC into the work of the local authority. This plan will be guided by "Getting Ready for UNCRC Incorporation Framework; A Practical Resource for Local Authorities in Scotland to prepare for UNCRC Incorporation", a resource provided by the Improvement Service.

This sets out 11 key areas:

- Leadership,
- Participation of Children and Young People;
- Empowerment of Children and Young People;
- Child Friendly Complaints Procedure;
- Training and Awareness Raising;
- Improving Practice - Tools and Resources to support your work;
- Publishing Child Friendly Information;
- Measuring Progress;
- Children's Rights Budgeting;
- Accountability and Reporting on Children's Rights;
- Non Discrimination / Rights at Risk.

Reporting Duty

Part 1, Section 2 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places a duty on listed public authorities to complete a children's rights report. Listed Public Authorities must every 3 years report on the steps they have taken within their area of responsibility to secure better or further effect of the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

In November 2020 Argyll and Bute produced a Children's Rights Report for the period 2020 -2023.

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-work

A new report will be produced in 2023, as is required by the Scottish Government. This report will look at action taken on children's rights locally in the last three years and set out the Action Plan going forward. Engagement and co-production with children and young people will inform this report and the action plan.

Trauma-Informed workforce

In 2019, Argyll and Bute Children's Services were selected by the Scottish Government as one of three areas to develop approaches to implementing the delivery of high-quality and sustainable trauma training across the children's workforce, including carers. The collaboration between education, psychology services, social work, CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service), and the third sector has been central to the delivery of this trial. Following a successful launch event held in Dunoon in December 2019, and despite the circumstances of the pandemic, we have successfully rolled out training across the workforce. At our Trauma Conference in November 2022, we celebrated our success and looked to the future with 135 practitioners, caregivers, managers, and young people. This conference celebrated the changes to practice that are making a difference to children, young people, and families, through the meaningful participation of young people, the work of the Family Placement Team, our nurturing schools, engagement with dyadic developmental practice and We have committed to further embedding our trauma-responsive children's services and children's workforce as a key strategic priority for the Children and Young People's Service Plan 2023–26, supported by the appointment of a trauma training coordinator to help embed training across services.

Key Areas of the Plan:

A. Increasing Income from Employment and Earnings

Employability

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-work>

Delivery of the Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) continues within the broader context of the No One Left Behind policy direction.

Eligible participants must have the right to live and work in the UK and are:

- Lone Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parents with a disability or families who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have a disabled child
- Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have 3 or more children
- Parents from a minority ethnic background who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have a youngest child
- Parents who are aged <25 who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty

The main objectives/expected outcomes are to support the delivery of the Scottish Government's Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) to deliver a flexible and 17 user-based model of employability support for the parental groups identified in Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026, through appropriate support focusing on intensive key worker support.

Low income families are supported to increase their income through work, both through supporting parents to access paid employment and in helping those in lower paid jobs to progress to higher paid employment. Our PESF Engagement Workers deliver intensive in and out of work employability support, including person centred support to up-skill, apply for jobs, gain progression whilst employment, money advice, health support, motivational support, completed accredited training, etc.

A PESF Employer Recruitment Incentive (ERI) programme is also offered by Argyll and Bute Council. ERIs play an important role in supporting those with the greatest barriers to employment, to enable them to obtain and remain in sustainable employment.

The ERI is available to use as a contribution to the additional costs of recruiting and sustaining eligible participants in employment. The ERI can be utilised in several ways such as for additional supervisory costs, training, initial travel to work costs, specialist in work support, or wages.

Up to £6,000 per participant is available, this allows employers to offer unemployed parents the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

The **Parental Welfare Fund** is aimed at parents receiving support through the PESF who successfully secure employment. It helps with the transition to work and can alleviate any worries. This fund offers up to £1,000 payable over the first 13 weeks of employment.

As an alternative to PESF, unemployed parents also have the choice to receive support from the following employability options should they decide this support best meets their needs:

Fair Start Scotland (FSS) is currently being delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team on behalf of People Plus.

<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/jobs-and-training/helping-people-work>

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-work>

To be eligible participants must be:

- Living in Scotland and eligible to work in the United Kingdom;
- over 18 and out of work; or
- 16 or 17 and are either disabled or in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit

This service is targeted at those who wish to receive individually tailored support up to 12 months to find and remain in employment or self-employment.

The Young Person's Guarantee also offers Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) of up to £6,000 per participant. This allows unemployed young parents aged 16 to 24 years the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-work>

Young people (including graduates) entitled to receive support through the YPG Employer Recruitment Incentive (ERI) are those who:

- Have the right to live and work in the UK
- Are currently resident in Argyll and Bute
- Are unemployed (or on a paid work experience programme such as Kickstart and Community Jobs Scotland) and meet one or more of the following criteria:
 - Disabled and/or deaf person (includes those experiencing mental health issues and those who have an impairment or long-term health condition)
 - Care experienced young people
 - Primary Carer
 - Person with a conviction (including Criminal Protective Orders)
 - No or limited work experience
 - Early leavers from the armed forces, veterans, and ex-forces personnel
 - Long-term unemployed (6 months or over) who are not on Community Work Placements
 - Person who has failed their ESA Work Capability Assessment
 - People from Ethnic Minority backgrounds and racial groups, with a targeted approach informed by local population data.
 - Gypsy/travelling community
 - Partner of current or ex-Armed Forces personnel
 - Person requiring support with language, literacy, or numeracy, including those for whom English is an additional language
 - Lone parent
 - Low skilled
 - A young person who was receiving additional support for learning in school
 - Refugee or other granted leave to stay in the UK
 - Homeless person (including temporary or unstable accommodation)
 - Person affected by substance misuse.

The No One Left Behind also offers Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) of up to £6,000 per participant. This allows unemployed participants aged 25 to 67 years the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-work>

Participants entitled to receive support through the NOLB Employer Recruitment Incentive (ERI) must:

- Have the right to live and work in the UK
- Be aged between 25 and 67 years up to 67 years (Pensionable age) and experiencing barriers to employment;
- Reside in Argyll and Bute
- Be unemployed and not participating in the Scottish Government's Fair Start Scotland programme.

Successes and Challenges

Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF)

To date 65 parents across the 6 target group have signed up to receive support from the Employability Team's PESF Engagement Workers; 47 (72%) were unemployed and 18 (38%) low income employed on commencing support.

Of the 65 parents supported to date currently; 17 (26%) are now in employment, 9 (14%) have increased their income, 16 (25%) are undertaken/completed training, 3 (5%) are in full time education, 1 (25) is in custody and 19 (29%) have disengaged/ceased support and are either unemployed or their whereabouts is unknown.

The 22/23 PESF funding allocation from the Scottish Government allowed for the recruitment of an additional Engagement Worker. Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in recruiting a suitable applicant. On approval from the Procurement Team one of our Third Sector Partners Inspiralba is now also delivering PESF support to eligible parents. From December 2022 to March 2023 45 parents commenced support.

<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/jobs-and-training/helping-people-work>

The main challenge identified in moving parents into employment has been lack of childcare, in particular childcare for children with disabilities and wraparound to accommodate school holidays.

Case Study 1 - Employability Team

<p>Who – tell us about the participant (age, area, etc. - names can be changed) Line of delivery Participants employability aim</p>	<p>AE is a 47 year old single parent of 2 teenage boys who had recently separated from her husband. AE had a history of alcohol misuse which she successfully overcame due to her determination to provide a better future for her sons. She worked part time but was struggling to pay her bills.</p> <p>AE’s dream was to become an HGV driver</p>
<p>Barriers Identified</p>	<p>At referral AE presented as low income employed and her previous alcohol left her experiencing a long term health condition. Due to AE’s low household income she couldn’t afford to pay for her much desired HGV Course. She had previously taken out a loan for the medical and theory part of the course but was unable to pay the £1,500 for the HGV lessons and test fee.</p>
<p>Impact – how has the participant changed or moved forward that would not have been the case without the support. What support has the participant received? (Training/learning participation etc.)</p>	<p>Through the PESF funding, the motivational and mental health support and help searching for employment opportunities from her PESF worker, AE passed her test and has now secured full time employment with a Haulage company in Aberdeen</p>
<p>What outcomes has the participant achieved (including soft skills, any milestones, qualifications etc.)?</p>	<p>AE has achieved her HGV Cat C license. She has gained confidence, has greater self-esteem and is feeling positive about the future.</p>
<p>Has there been any partnership working in order to help the participant e.g. CAB, Business Gateway, health visitors, counselling, external organisations etc. (list is not exhaustive)</p>	<p>AE’s PESF worker liaised with other members from the ABC Employability Team regarding Haulage employment opportunities. She also worked in partnership with a training centre in Glasgow which could provide the necessary training required for participant.</p>
<p>Quote from participant – their views on the support offered and outcome achieved?</p>	<p>“I just wanted to send a wee quick message to you to thank you for helping me. I cried when I came off the phone to you. I’ve been trying so long for this and was desperate to get a break and I’m actually now feeling so positive about the future” “Just to let you know I passed my HGV driving test this afternoon!!It still feels like a dream. I’m still in shock. Just wanted to say thanks so much for what you did. I couldn’t have done this without you. I’ve finished reading the book you recommended so it’s onwards and upwards for me now!”</p>

Case Study 2 - Employability Team

Who – tell us about the participant (age, area, etc. - names can be changed) Line of delivery Participants employability aim	B is a 32 year old Syrian refugee living in Argyll and Bute. He lives with his wife and 2 children. B has a job working nightshift in a factory on minimum wage. In the near future, when his English improves, B hopes to do a course in computer programming and his dream is to start up his own business
Barriers Identified	Language barrier Transport – no public transport at night meaning he has a long walk to and from work No access to a digital device
Impact – how has the participant changed or moved forward that would not have been the case without the support. What support has the participant received? (Training/learning participation etc.)	Funding from PESF meant that B could be provided with a bike, helmet and lights, meaning that he could work extra hours and increase his monthly wage. Due to the timings B was unable to attend the ESOL classes available from Community Learning. His PESF worker was able to provide a laptop and enrol B in an online ESOL course which he is able to do on his days off. B has a long term plan and with support from his PESF worker, continued progress with his ESOL course and partnership working with Business Gateway, his dream could become a reality.
What outcomes has the participant achieved (including soft skills, any milestones, qualifications etc.)?	B has increased his monthly wage thus increasing his household income and passed his first Beginners English Skills test.
Has there been any partnership working in order to help the participant e.g. CAB, Business Gateway, health visitors, counselling, external organisations etc. (list is not exhaustive)	Partnership working with Argyll and Bute Refugee Support Worker and Live Argyll’s Community Learning Team.
Quote from participant – their views on the support offered and outcome achieved?	“My family and I have received a lot of support since coming to Scotland. I received a bike and a laptop which has helped me work more hours and I am able to study in my free time. I hope to start up my own business in the future. The continued support I receive from my PESF worker is very much appreciated”

Fair Start Scotland (FSS)

Fair Start Scotland support is provided face to face or remotely to allow participants the choice of what works best for them.

Over the last 12 months 80 new participants commenced individually tailored provision FSS, 19 of which are parents of dependent children. Keyworkers supported these participants as well as existing case-loads and successfully moved a total of 37 into employment across a number of sectors. In work support is offered to allow continuation of support whilst in employment.

As this is a voluntary service the challenge continues to be competition from other provision such as DWP support, PESF, NOLB and the YPG.

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG)

The YPG has been well received in particular Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs). A total of 79 young people have commenced employment with 64 employers due to the funding available. Of the 34 young people who have reached the end of their funding or decided to end their funded employment; 15 (44%) have been retained in employment with the employer who accessed the subsidy, 6 (18%) are now working with a different employer, 1 (3%) has returned to school, 1 (3%) is at college and 11 (32%) are currently job searching or their whereabouts is unknown.

YPG and NOLB Pre-employment Support

Delivered by Third Sector partner organisations a total of 260 participants (including 42 parents) commenced pre-employment support from April 2022; 104 aged 16 to 24 years and 87 aged 25 plus years. To date 16 have moved into work, 1 self-employment, 11 work experience and 28 Long Term Unemployed paid work placements. These figures are up to 31st December 2022, the next data figures to 31st March 2022 will be available mid-April 2023. This support was funded by the NOLB 2022/23.

These programmes have been extremely successful and it hoped similar will be delivered in 2023/24 subject to the Scottish Government's grant allocation terms and conditions.

Plans Ahead

To continue marketing all employability support to encourage parents to sign up to receive the support which best meets their individual needs.

The Scottish Government will shortly be issuing NOLB All Age Service and Child Poverty Grant Offers Letters to all local authorities in respect of allocations for 2023/24. Pre-employment and low income employment support will be devised in line with funding requirements.

Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership (ABEP) Improvement Action Plan review to be carried out.

The Parental Welfare Fund will be available in 2023/24 to provide financial assistance to parents in the first 3 months of employment.

The Scottish Government has extended Fair Start Scotland by one year to allow referrals to be accepted up to 31st March 2024.

The Employability Team has secured UK Government funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to offer unemployed residents of Argyll and Bute pre-employment support, training and work placements. Training will also be available to those in low income employment who hope to upskill to enable them to apply for higher paid job opportunities. All interventions will be available from April 2023 to March 2025.

School Service Offer - Our careers advisers work in partnership with every state secondary school in Argyll and Bute, delivering career guidance to enable young people from S1-S6 to develop their Career Management Skills via a range of group work and 1-1 coaching conversations. We work closely with our partners within the school to identify young person who are considered to be most at risk of not making a positive progression from school, helping those young people to develop their career management skills and move onto education, employment or training when they leave school.

From 1 June to 31 December 2022, we delivered 2,082 Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for 1,313 school pupils through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions.

For more information, please click on the following link: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/scotlands-careers-services/>

School Leaver Cohort 20/21 - 838 young people left school during the 21/22 school cohort and our team worked hard over the summer months to follow up those who had left to ensure support was offered. The 2022 Annual Participation Measure showed that of the 2,979 16-19 year olds in Argyll & Bute 93.9% were in education, employment or training and personal development.

Post School Service Next Steps – Our service supports young people aged 16 – 18 (extended to 26 for care experienced young people) who are unemployed, helping them to build up their career management skills and move on to and sustain a range of options as appropriate: Training programmes, employability support, education and employment. From 1 April to 31 December 2022 we delivered 465 Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for 221 post-school customers through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions.

Post school service: adults & PACE - Working in partnership with a range of partners to support local hubs helping unemployed adults to develop their career management and employability skills and move into employment. In Argyll & Bute our advisers have worked closely with the Employability Partnership (DWP & CLD) to deliver support via our local learning hub format.

PACE: Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) is the Scottish Government's initiative dedicated to responding to redundancy situations. Through providing skills development and employability support, PACE aims to minimise the time individuals affected by redundancy are out of work. PACE brings together 24 organisations, together with the Scottish Government to provide free and impartial advice, guidance and support for individuals affected by redundancy.

PACE support is available to all individuals affected by redundancy.

Advisers have extensive experience of dealing with redundancy situations and can:

Help with CV, job search, applications, and interviews, advise on benefits, staff may be entitled to provide information on learning and training opportunities.

PACE support is delivered using a variety of delivery methods including Face to face, **PACE** Helpline, through webinars and enhanced online resources.

From 1 April to 31 December 2022, we have supported 7 employers and 67 individuals dealing with redundancy.

Visit www.redundancyscotland.co.uk for more information or call 0800 917 8000 to speak to an adviser.

My World of Work - Our website provides trustworthy, expert information and advice and it's free to access for people at any stage in their career. The site is designed to support people of all ages and stages, with activities and tools to help them identify the opportunities open to them. Our school, post school and PACE career coaches have been supporting Argyll and Bute customers by sign posting them to My World of Work for opportunities and developing their career management skills. Parents and schools have been using this service to support pupils with their career journey. Find out more at www.myworldofwork.co.uk

Care Experienced: Our advisers continue to work in close partnership with the Argyll and Bute Council Throughcare/After Care and Social Work teams to work with young people who are care experienced and to ensure our support is delivered at the right time and with the relevant support from other key workers supporting the young person.



Summary of Learning HUBS

The Learning HUBS are being set up in 6 different locations across Argyll with Oban, Campbeltown, Lochgilphead and Rothesay currently in operation with Helensburgh and Dunoon coming on board by late summer. The HUBS are for Adult Learners from age of 16+ (who have left school).

Adult Learning (Community Learning Services) set up and oversee them and have been working in Partnership with other Services to look at how they can collectively provide a holistic and safe space for those members of the community who are wanting to access learning and increase their skills development.

Partners who are regularly or weekly involved alongside the Community Learning worker/s are SDS (Skills Development Scotland) and DWP Job Centre plus (JCP). Which brings added value and additional support.

As the HUBS evolve other Partners will be invited to participate through session slots to raise awareness of their services or to give guidance and support. Within their communities. (This will be different to each local area). For example:

Housing, HCSP, Argyll College

Learner can access the HUBS for support in: Life Skills for Work and Personal Development

Basic Digital skills

Employability support

Accredited Learning Opportunities

Study Skills

Information and sign posting to services and other organisations

Basic financial capability including budgeting

Learners new to social media and Internet (how to use it to keep in touch with family/friends), online shopping, Banking, paying bills etc.

Numbers of learners attending the HUBS are slowly increasing as Adult Learners start to return to "life after lockdown"

Attendance: weekly average numbers mixture of regular attenders and Drop In/ attenders (may only attend once or twice) January 2022 – June 2022 (present)

Learning HUBS	Number of participants
Lochgilphead	13
Oban	3
Rothesay	6
Campbeltown	8
Helensburgh	0
Dunoon	0
Area wide total across all areas combined	On average 30 people per week numbers slowly growing

Council Apprenticeships

Since April 2022, we have employed 5 new modern apprentices. This brings the total number of apprentices employed since 2014 to 75. Overall, we still have a high rate of apprentices going onto secure employment with Argyll and Bute Council on completion with 73% of all apprentices completed securing a job with the council. As our apprenticeship vacancies are offered based on workforce need determined through our workforce planning process, we are hopeful this rate will remain high.

We have also continued to offer our foundation apprenticeship in social services children and young people across schools within Argyll and Bute. The foundation apprenticeship offers the opportunity for a school pupil to gain work experience and a vocational qualification whilst in school. They gain a qualification which is equivalent to a Higher and at the same time get to experience a work placement which provides them with key experience, skills and knowledge. This is not only a brilliant addition to a school leavers CV, but it allows Argyll and Bute Council to grow a quality Early Years workforce for the future. Argyll and Bute Council continues to work closely with schools to facilitate work placements for young people where possible and has established links with DYW Argyll to offer opportunities for young people in the local area where it is possible to do so.

Education 2022-2023

Schools have been able to provide renewed consistency for learners since spring 2021. Whilst Covid19 has continued to place additional pressures on staffing and attendance at schools, school communities have enjoyed the return to face to face teaching. All education establishments continued to have contingency plans in place for any return to remote learning and effective communication with parents/carers from both schools and the Education Authority has been a priority. This has allowed schools to respond quickly to changing demands that Covid19 absences placed on our school communities.

Schools have focussed on re-establishing relationships, focussing on the health and well-being of learners alongside literacy and numeracy priorities. Nurture continues to play a vital role in ensuring that our learners the right environment to learn. The Exchange are now providing a counselling service for pupils within schools, again, this is helping to support the wellbeing needs of pupils. A focus on play pedagogy and outdoor learning within primary schools has also been an important focus within school improvement plans.

Assessing learners' progress in literacy, numeracy and other curricular areas, in order that the next steps in learning can be identified, has remained a priority.



CEL data has informed schools of their progress in relation to this and ensured that support and interventions can be coordinated centrally. The PT Recovery and Renewal has continued to work with head teachers within these schools to consider how best to target interventions and, where appropriate, offered training in delivering interventions to ASN and teaching staff. This is central to closing the attainment gap. Additional support and direction has also been put in place to ensure that PEF plans are robust and provide targeted interventions to help close the poverty related attainment gap.

Digital technology such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and SeeSaw has continued to be used to engage pupils and improve communications with parents. Schools have also welcomed parents and partners back into schools to re-engage and involve them in learning. We recognise the importance of parental involvement and engagement in improving outcomes for children and young people. Schools and parent councils are responding to the needs of their community in how they are structuring events and meetings with many parent council meetings continuing to take place virtually as it can help with attendance in particular environments. Connect membership for Parent Councils has also helped support parental involvement and engagement.

The Addressing Non Attendance working group has consulted with all stakeholders to develop work that will help maximise attendance across the local authority.

Schools have continued to support and promote the National Entitlement Card that allows under 22's access to free bus travel. There is scope to improve the uptake of the free bus travel and the Education Department is revising their approach to help address this.

Across secondary schools, the Education Department has been supporting the role of the Mentors In Violence Prevention Programme. A development plan is in place to take the current 3 schools engaged to all secondary schools engaged by 2025. This programme is a mentor based programme that addresses gender based violence. This work is an important part of the Violence Against Women and Girls Project. The work brings together key partners such as Police Scotland and Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis to help support the training and development of mentors and the education of mentees.

In line with UNCRC, We have seen steady progress with Rights Respecting Schools Awards. Since January 2023, 1 school has registered and a further 4 schools have been accredited Bronze. This takes accreditations within Argyll & Bute to 11 registrations, 31 bronze (including 1 partner nursery), 10 silver (including 1 partner nursery) and 4 gold awards. Information has been sent to head teachers to remind them that the award is funded by the Scottish Government until 2025 and that a professional learning event for RRS leads in schools is being developed to support the completion of the action plan that will help schools secure Bronze accreditation.

Education and NHS collaborated to support the return of the drama production tours of "Smoke Free Me" (P6/7) and "You Are Not Alone" (S3). The updated productions included new themes such as vaping. Initial staff evaluations evidence that schools have welcomed the opportunity to re-engage with partners through these productions, that the productions were well received by learners and that this is a useful vehicle for creating discussion around the themes. Evaluative feedback to date demonstrates that staff felt that the productions raised awareness of the support that is available to learners.

Early Years

The Early Years team have continued to upskill our head teachers, setting managers, lead practitioners and practitioners around the use of SIMD profiling data to specifically target input and resources to support the closure of the poverty-related outcome gap.

In addition, within our more rural and remote communities, where SIMD data is less robust, we encourage all staff to use local knowledge, everyday observation and conversations with families and children to ensure that more qualitative data collection methods are valued and used to target resources effectively and equitably to deliver improved outcomes for all.

Within the central EY team, our Excellence and Equity Leads, in particular, have planned for and carried out targeted work with children living in lower bands of SIMD, as directed by their nationally prescribed remit. This work includes supporting individual children with learning to listen inputs to support language acquisition, story-sharing initiatives to build vocabulary and liaising with speech and language colleagues to ensure staff have an understanding of how to support speech development where there may be developmental delay. All of this work is grounded in the use of improvement methodology to ensure that our approaches are evidence-based and leading to the improvements we require to close the outcome gap for specific children.

Our Family Support workers have also been active within our community, attending parent and toddler groups to ensure family learning initiatives around dental health, toilet training, community support initiatives, foodbank access, library sessions, Bookbug sessions and PEEP training sessions are being shared as widely as possible with parents. They are also working closely with Health Visitors to support families to address health and well-being concerns, and gather data around community need to ensure we tailor our future CLPL inputs appropriately. We recently carried out several stay and play/Bookbug sessions within community venues to encourage parents to come along with their child and enjoy a fun-filled session, with no cost implication as part of our Easter holiday offer.

Moving forward, it is part of our work with our Children and Young People's Service plan (CYPSP) to work closely with Health Visitors and Allied Health Professionals to ensure we deliver universal supports to improve infant mental health and wellbeing through building an EY workforce which is trauma informed and trauma responsive in practice; this work sits alongside more targeted interventions in liaison with Argyll & Bute's Infant Mental Health service, to ensure that we are meeting children's needs at all levels whilst also supporting the family unit around the child to support strong attachments which support children to thrive.

Finally, we have committed fiscally this session to support the focus upon early years' environments, both indoors and outdoors, which nurture and support children developmentally whilst providing the space, awe and wonder to encourage play which builds upon their natural curiosity as a learner. This is to ensure that every child has the best start in life and is ready to achieve their potential, irrespective of their social or economic starting point.

It had been anticipated that the academic year 2022/23 would return to a more normal mode of delivery for Higher and Further Education courses at Argyll College. All students were given the opportunity to attend their courses from their local learning centres but allowance was made for students to also link in to courses remotely from home. Almost 50% of our full time students in the end opted to study at least some of their classes remotely, several citing cost of travel or caring responsibilities as reasons for this. Whilst there are undoubtedly some convenience and possibly cost saving aspects there are also several drawbacks and these students are generally not achieving as successfully as more engaged students and there is a higher withdrawal rate. Reasons given for withdrawal are feelings of isolation, not feeling engaged with their studies, or students gradually just no longer attending. Without seeing these students so much in person it has also been harder to identify issues with a student's wellbeing early on in the student journey. Argyll College is looking to put measures in place to encourage more in person attendance in the learning centres for the coming academic year. These include more cross course student activities, quicker access to student advisers for learning and pastoral support, enhanced support to apply for all relevant funding. Where necessary the college has continued to provide long term loan of suitable laptops and dongles to allow students to study remotely.

The cost of living crisis has impacted students too. All Argyll College Learning centres now provide access to facilities where students can make hot drinks or heat food. Basic breakfast ingredients, soups and some ready meals are all free and available to our students to take as they need. College discretionary funds have been used to provide additional money to low-income households – young students in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance currently receive an uplift of £20 per week, students who have a reduced bursary due to Universal Credit entitlement have had two one-off payments in this current year, again to help with the cost of living.

The College Counselling service continues to be well used with an increase in numbers using this service from the previous year. This rise in numbers was not unexpected and the college Counsellor was able to cover this with only a slight increase to waiting times (these still remained at two weeks or less). Students also are encouraged to access Wellbeing Resources managed through Together all and Spectrum Life – two online services subscribed to by UHI.

Other college support services continue to be delivered through a mix of online and face to face. Information that would normally be promoted to students via posters within the learning centres is passed out by email / social media campaigns from time to time, co-ordinated with visits to the online classrooms to give more information. Examples of these would be reminding students of the availability of period products via Hey Girls, where to find information and support for gender based violence etc.

B. Increasing Income through Benefits

Client Gain through Advice Activity:

Once again Advice Services across Argyll and Bute have managed to make a considerable difference in the lives of people who are struggling. The table below shows the client gain from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 for the citizens of Argyll and Bute as **£10,849,000**.

Organisation	2022/2023 (£'000)
Bute Advice Centre	2.249
Argyll and Bute Council Welfare Rights Service	4.324
ACHA Welfare Rights	2.690
Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau	0.875
ALLenergy	0.275
Fyne Homes	0.426
TOTAL	10.839

Flexible Food and Fuel Fund

Launched on 11 January 2021 the Argyll and Bute Flexible Food and Fuel Fund (FFFF) uses funds provided by the Scottish Government to support people with financial insecurities to pay for food and fuel during these tough times.

At the end of March 2023, there has been 1,810 families supported and the combined total client gain is £2.528 million meaning that the average client gain per household is £1,397. In addition the team are managing a debt portfolio of £220,000 across all claimants where they continue to negotiate with creditors to reduce the arrears of individuals and families receiving support.

The project has recently received national acclaim winning the ASSIST Facilities Management Community Focus Award 2022/2023. Looking forward funding has been secured through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and, combined with residual Scottish Government funds this will see the project supported for a further two years to March 2025.

The Welfare Rights Team at Argyll and Bute Council continues to ensure that residents of Argyll and Bute are not missing out on their entitlement to both UK and Scottish Government administered benefits and other related help.

We provide advice to members of the public on claiming benefits. This includes carrying out benefit checks, completion of application forms and providing representation for clients if they wish to challenge a decision. The service has a key focus on maximising income and reducing poverty. Our support is targeted at some of the most vulnerable in our communities and makes a significant contribution to tackling fuel poverty by maximising household income and preventing homelessness.

Two members of our team are funded by MacMillan Cancer Support and they are able to provide an enhanced Welfare Rights Service for people affected by cancer across the area.

In 2023 the Welfare Rights Team will continue to promote the service with partners and community groups across all areas with particular emphasis on the islands and rural locations.

The annual Customer Satisfaction Survey report for 2022/23 has been completed – a total of 114 responses were received:

- 99% of customers would recommend the service
- 99% rated their overall experience of using the service as excellent or good
- 96% said the time taken to respond to their initial enquiry was excellent or good
- 87% of respondents added an additional comment, examples are;

“Fantastic service which we are very lucky to have living in a rural location”

“Much underrated service of great benefit to the community”

“I would not have been able to deal with the process of appealing without their help, exceptional!”

Social Security Scotland

The Scottish Government’s 2nd Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (Best Start, Bright Futures), backed up by up to £113m extra investment this year, sets out bold action to drive progress on the national mission to tackle child poverty.

The actions set out are projected to drive child poverty in Scotland to the lowest levels in 30 years, with current projections suggesting 60,000 fewer children could live in relative poverty by 2023 compared to 2017 (to 17%, from 24%).

This includes lifting an estimated 50,000 children out of relative poverty in 2023 through the Scottish Child Payment.

The Scottish Government’s package of five family benefits for low income families, administered by Social Security Scotland, is now worth up to a maximum of over £10,000 by the time a family’s first child turns six – and £9,700 for second and subsequent children.

Social Security Scotland is responsible for administering a number of benefits that have been devolved to Scotland.

Currently, Social Security Scotland administers thirteen benefits, eight of which are brand new.

The benefits includes:

- **Carer’s Allowance Supplement** – an extra payment of £245.70 paid twice a year for people in Scotland who get Carer’s Allowance on a particular date.
- **Best Start Grant** - is a package of three payments that will give extra money to families on certain benefits or tax credits during the early years of a child’s life.
 - o **Best Start Grant – Pregnancy and Baby Payment** – one off payment of up to £642.35 from 24 weeks in pregnancy up until a baby turns six months for families who get certain benefits. This goes up to one if you’ve taken over looking after a child, such as if you’ve adopted. You get £642.35 for your first child or £321.20 for any subsequent child.
 - o **Best Start Grant – Early Learning Payment** – one off payment of £267.65 when a child is between two and three years and six months. People can still apply if your child is not taking up a place at nursery
 - o **Best Start Grant – School Age Payment** – one off payment of £267.65 for eligible families around the time a child normally starts Primary 1. People can still apply if they are deferring school entry.

- Best Start Foods – a prepaid card for families to help buy food for children under three or during pregnancy. It replaced the UK Government’s Healthy Start Vouchers in Scotland.
- Funeral Support Payment – a payment available to people in Scotland, who are on certain benefits or tax credits, and need support to meet the costs of a funeral.
- Young Carer Grant - a yearly payment of £326.65 for young carers aged 16 to 18 who live in Scotland and care for people for an average of 16 hours a week or more.
- Job Start Payment - a one off payment of £267.65 for 16 to 24 year olds, or £428.25 if the main carer of any children, who have been out of work and on certain benefits for six months or more to help with the costs of starting a job.
- Child Winter Heating Assistance – a payment of £214.10 to help disabled children and young people and their families with increased heating costs over winter.
- Scottish Child Payment – a benefit unique to Scotland of £100 every four weeks to eligible families and carers to help towards the costs of looking after each child under 16. There are no limits on the number of eligible children supported by the Scottish Child Payment.
- Child Disability Payment - provides support for the extra costs that a disabled child might have, whether mental or physical disabilities. People can apply for Child Disability Payment for a disabled child under 16 however Social Security Scotland will pay Child Disability Payment until the child is 18.
- Adult Disability Payment – is extra money to help people who have a disability or long-term health condition that everyday life.
- Winter Heating Payment - a yearly payment of £50 to help people on low income benefits who might have extra heating needs during the winter.

Social Security Scotland is working in close partnership with organisations across Argyll and Bute to maximise the take-up of these benefits.

The Local Delivery team continue to be very busy helping clients apply and we have increased the number of community venues on offer for clients to choose although home visits remain the most popular choice.

There has been excellent joint working with Education staff to get targeted information out to parents on the increase and change to the Scottish Child Payment and this is reflected in the very positive quarterly increase.

The Argyll and Bute team have been attending the Ukrainian Welcome Fayres across Argyll and Bute to support Ukrainian families to claim our benefits. Information at the Fayres was provided in Ukrainian and Russian to assist with this and Social Security Scotland also has interpretation services to support.

Social Security Scotland statistics: publications - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Money Counts Level 1 Awareness Raising Sessions

The Money Counts Level 1 awareness session was co-developed by the Highland Money Counts Partnership including the Trussell Trust, NHS Highland, Highland Council and Social Security Scotland, in partnership with the Independent Food Aid Network and Nourish Scotland. This is a short, 45 minute awareness session, delivered remotely through Teams for anyone who may feel less confident and experienced about discussing money worries, but may be in a position to have a brief conversation with individuals and signpost on. This session is targeted at anyone from health, education and social care staff; 3rd sector workers and volunteers; warm place volunteers and anyone who may be able to start a brief conversation about money worries.

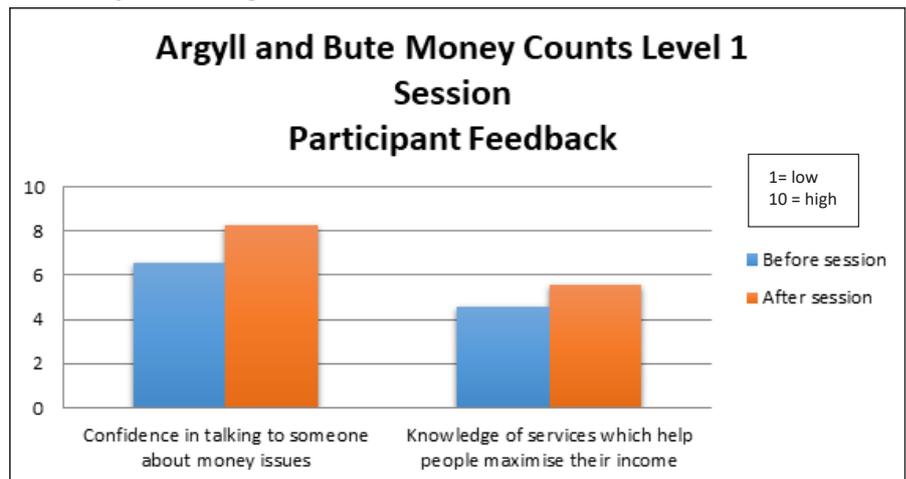
The session aims to:

- Increase understanding of poverty and its impact;
- Increase confidence to ask about money worries;
- Increase knowledge of support services for money matters.

The session helps to promote the Argyll and Bute Worrying about Money leaflet (see item 2 below). Initially, the sessions were delivered separately both in Argyll and Bute and North Highland areas; however, from the beginning of this year the sessions are being delivered together. This gives more sessions available to staff throughout the NHS Highland area. Figures and feedback for Argyll and Bute are being collected separately. Since the sessions have been available to staff throughout Argyll and Bute HSCP, there has been 9 sessions, with a total of 40 attendees with very positive feedback – see chart below.

A chart showing how much people changed their confidence and skills levels because of the training.

Following a slow start with attendance, numbers in Argyll and Bute are picking up and it is hoped that with regular advertising and people who have already attended spreading the word, these numbers will continue to grow for the benefit of communities in Argyll and Bute.



Worrying about money leaflets

The 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflet is a straightforward resource both for people facing money worries and support workers. The step-by-step guide identifies which local agencies are best placed to help people maximise income and access any existing financial entitlements.

These leaflets are available for many individual local authorities in the UK and this is the link to the Argyll and Bute leaflet.

[Argyll and Bute - Worrying about Money?](#)

www.worryingaboutmoney.co.uk

<https://www.worryingaboutmoney.co.uk/argyll-and-bute>

As well as in English, this leaflet is now available in Gaelic, Ukrainian, Polish and Arabic versions and all are available to download from the website link above. These leaflets have been distributed to a range of health settings and community events, including Chronic Pain workshops.



Community Link Workers

The General Medical Services contract for primary care delivery in Scotland included the roll out of Links Workers as one of six new requirements for Health & Social Care Partnership, to be delivered in partnership with primary care settings. This service is one of a number of activities designed to remove the pressure on GP services by reducing the burden on GP time, freeing them to focus on their role. Community Links Workers (CLW) can take referrals from primary care teams and use a person-centred social prescribing approach to strengthen the link between primary care, other health services, and community resources.

The CLW works with an individual to identify underlying causes and stressors in their life, which are having a negative impact on their health. These causes and stressors are often complex socioeconomic issues which are more appropriately addressed by services other than primary care. The CLW supports individuals to set goals and to navigate barriers to accessing services. The aim is to support people in taking control over their own health and wellbeing, and includes referring them to community services which can support them in doing so. CLWs therefore play a role in addressing poverty, one of the socioeconomic determinants of health.

The CLW service in Argyll and Bute currently delivers support in 13 GP practices, since March 2022. GP practices receiving the service are in the most deprived areas of Argyll and Bute. The successful commissioned service who delivers the programme is We Are With You, a 3rd Sector organisation.

Referrals from GP practices allocated CLW hours have steadily increased since launch. The service is now available in 13 GP practices, with an additional practice due to receive a service shortly following recruitment. The referral process for the Argyll and Bute Service is via the Elemental social prescribing software which integrates with GP practice systems. Outcomes in 2022 - 2023 include:

- 436 referrals received in the first year of the service.
- 92.6% of people who have completed a wellbeing scale at entry and exit have recorded an improvement in their scores, with an average increase of 5.28% in their scores.
- For people being seen for more than 6-8 weeks, Wellbeing Outcome Star measure is used, with 100% of these individuals having increased scores.
- Top reasons for referral were mental health (52%), social isolation (14%), stress (14%), finance (10%), long-term conditions (10%), and housing and essential needs (14%).
- 41 out of 42 people who completed a satisfaction survey strongly agreed/agreed that they had received the right support from the link worker.

www.buteadvice.org.uk/files/ugd/8240ff_be82a1fb63d34014922ff93d0315f12a.pdf

Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships

In 2023, the Scottish Government increased the funding available to develop Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHPs). This increased funding is being used to test the partnerships in remote and rural areas. WAHP's provide access to money and welfare rights advice in health care settings. This is achieved by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices.

Welfare advice specialists provide an effective support service on all matters relating to welfare benefits and entitlements. The overall aim of the service is to ensure that the correct amount of benefit is paid at the correct time and to assist with budgeting skills so that households can pay their bills, heat their homes, and have a better quality of life.

WAHP's provide GP practices with welfare advice specialists who can support patients to improve their financial situation. There is a strong correlation between improving people's financial situation and improved health outcomes so supporting patients around financial issues should:

- ensure people are directed to the right support;
- help reduce demand on practice time through practice staff being able to identify patients who would benefit from financial advice during appointments;
- allow GP appointments to be more focused on medical matters.

This initiative will help to address financial insecurity for individuals who may not seek support from other means of welfare advice and in doing so contribute to improvements in health and reduce demands on Primary Care services.

Funding is being allocated to Argyll and Bute Council for additional resource for welfare advice specialists, for a 2-year pilot. Preparation for these partnerships has taken place between December 2022 and March 2023. The service will start in five GP practices in Argyll and Bute in April 2023. The 5 rural GP surgeries in the Mid-Argyll and Kintyre area that were selected have all now agreed to take part in programme which will start on 1st April 2023.

Cool2talk

Cool2talk supplies free, anonymous, and confidential health information for young people. Cool2Talk reported that during the period 2020–2022, an average of 123 questions were asked per year. The questions covered a broad range of topics. The most often discussed topics in 2020-2021 were sexual health (26), general health (21) and anxiety (15). 45% of the total questions asked in the year 2021–2022, were assigned to the emotional health topic. In addition, there were 37 questions assigned to the relationships topic; this may have been due to the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on young people's mental wellbeing and their friendships.

From 2020-2023 cool2talk received three questions related to work/money worries and the impact this had on emotional health. The young people who asked these questions received a bespoke response. Two of the young people were signposted to Citizens Advice, one was signposted to Argyll and Bute Councils money advice section of their website. All young people were also signposted to Breathing Space or advised to speak to someone they trust such as a school counsellor.

Living Well Networks

There are four Living Well Network (LWN) Coordinators in Argyll and Bute covering eight areas (Bute and Cowal; Helensburgh and Lomond; Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islay; Oban, Lorn and The Islands). The purpose of the Networks is to develop local partnership working and planning for health improvement activity.

The LWN's are supported by and help to build capacity for the Public Health Team. They are the link to the community and Third Sector for the PH team. The Networks hold quarterly meetings inviting all their members and in between meetings send out information or newsletters. Each Network creates an annual action plan identifying priorities to focus on. Last year all Networks had speakers at their meetings presenting on child poverty. Presenters included the Poverty Alliance Scotland, Social Security Scotland, ALI-Energy, A&B Children and Families, Bute Advice Centre, Flexible Food Fund etc. In addition, the LWN Coordinators helped to promote the Flexible Food Fund Road shows and one Coordinator created a twelve-page document summarising all the information provided by the speakers to distribute to all LWN members. All Networks promote the Money Worries training and leaflet to all members.

C. Cost of Living Housing

Rent levels

In 2022-2023 the Scottish Government has frozen rents in both the social and private rented sectors. This ensured that rent levels remained constant to protect those low-income families struggling due to the Cost of Living Crisis. As of January 2023, the rent is no longer frozen for Social Rented homes and Private Rented homes rent rises are capped at 3%.

Number of children in housing need in Argyll and Bute

In March 2023, children accounted for 29% of the HOMEArgyll Common Waiting List which equated to 1869 children. Applications from households with children accounted for 30% of all housing applications equating to 974 households. This comprises of households waiting on a social rented home, homeless households, and those already housed in social rented accommodation. This latter group need or want to transfer to another home often because they want or need a different-sized home or a home with specialist provision.

The waiting list demonstrates that 79% of households with children (773) have been assessed as being in housing need and consequently 1537 children have been allocated additional housing points.

The number of households with children under 16 years of age on the homeless and general waiting list, in September 2022 equated to 636 households compared to 633 in March 2023. The number of children on the homeless and general waiting list has declined slightly from 1,180 in September 2022 to 1,168 in March 2023.

Number of households with children and the number of children waiting for a social rented property.

HOME Argyll waiting list	No of households with children under 16	Total No of children
General list	573	1043
Homeless list	60	125
Transfer list	341	701
TOTAL	974	1869

Source: Abris (Argyll and Bute's Joint Housing Register) March 2023

Affordable Housing Supply

The following actions are being undertaken in Argyll and Bute to increase the supply of affordable housing:

- New Builds - In Argyll and Bute, in 2022-2023, 177 new energy-efficient homes were built due to Argyll and Bute's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP).
- Community Housing Trusts-Housing Services has established a Community Housing Network to enable Community Housing Trusts to obtain the support they require to deliver affordable housing to their communities. In 2022-2023, 18 affordable homes were built or brought back into use and work on five new build affordable homes on Gigha has commenced.
- Buy Backs-As well as new build homes, the HOMEArgyll Partners have bought some private homes, which they have added to their affordable rented stock to increase the number of properties available to rent at an affordable rate. In 2023-2024 the council and HOMEArgyll partners hope to increase the number of homes they are able to buy back from the private sector through the "Argyll and Bute Buy Back Initiative".
- Short-Term Let Legislation- the Scottish Government considers that introducing the legislation will increase the supply of homes available for local residents. In 2022-2023, applications for Short Term Letting Licences commenced in Argyll and Bute, with the legal obligation to obtain a licence coming into force in 2023-2024.
- Supplying homes in the right places and homes for key workers-
The Argyll and Bute SHIP programme and the Strategic Housing Fund (SHF) have supported the provision of new homes in islands such as:
 - o Jura
 - o Islay
 - o Colonsay
 - o Coll
 - o Tiree
 - o Mull
 - o Ulva and
 - o Gigha

As well as developments in smaller settlements such as:

- o Inveraray
- o Benderloch
- o North Connel
- o Port Appin and
- o Barcaldine

The Rural Growth Deal will also increase the number of homes available for key workers. Parents having access to high-quality jobs can lift children out of poverty. However, there are several barriers to obtaining high-quality employment in rural areas.

"specific rural barriers [to employment] such as greater distances to employment/childcare providers, limited access to social housing and more expensive transport costs." (Glass, 2020, p7).

Therefore, it is essential to have affordable homes located in places close to employment and childcare to reduce the barriers to employment.

- 16-18-year-olds- When there is a lack of supply of affordable homes, sixteen to eighteen-year-olds who are unable to live at home due to overcrowding or due to the family home not being accessible from their place of employment or training may be forced to stay with friends/ 'sofa surfing'. These insecure and precarious housing arrangements can easily result in homelessness.

Housing vulnerable families who are more likely to be in poverty

The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) recognises that children and families in these households are more likely to experience poverty. Hence, the LHS outlines a series of actions to address disadvantage and alleviate poverty. These include preventing families and young people from becoming homeless.

The percentage of household types who are in relative poverty

Source: Scottish Government Child Poverty Strategy.

- Insecure tenancies in the Private Rented Sector- Many families live in the private rented sector. This sector is often expensive, and tenancies are less secure, with some families living in this sector being pushed into poverty or even homelessness. This is evidenced by the authors of “Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post 2021”, which stated that the largest proportion of those subjected to formal homelessness assessments in Scotland lived in a private rented properties.

In addition to the homelessness risk, there is a risk that the tenancy will end and that the family will have to move to a new area to find a new home, resulting in children having to move schools. Research suggests that regularly changing schools affect children’s attainment and, therefore, their life chances.

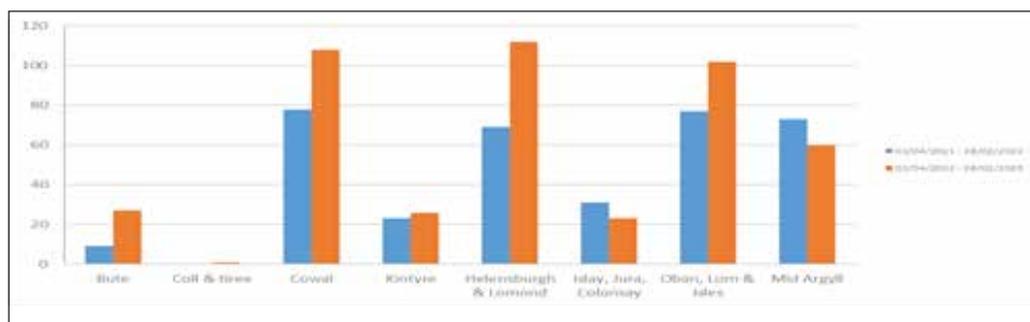
- Homelessness-The housing options service assists families and individual young people aged 16-18 in identifying the type of home they need and can afford. This reduces the number of failed tenancies, thus ensuring more tenants can remain in their homes. This preventative work reduces incidences of homelessness which in turn contributes to reducing child poverty.

There was a significant decline in the number of homeless children in Argyll and Bute from 319 in 2017/18 to 175 in 2021/22. In 2021/22, 374 homeless cases were closed, of which 119 involved households with dependent children (amounting to 196 children) and 87 of these households received a positive outcome.

However, homelessness applications have risen sharply between the 1st of April 2022 and the 28th of February 2023. During that period, 460 homeless applications were made, an increase of 99 applications (27% up) in the same period in the previous year. There are currently 267 statutory homeless households waiting for permanent accommodation, with 60 of these households having children in them. Although there is a rising homelessness trend, the number of children in homeless households has reduced from 175 children in 2021/2022 to 125 in 2022-2023.

Homelessness applications vary by location, with Cowal, Helensburgh and Lomond, and Oban, Lorn & the Isles seeing the highest levels of homeless applications.

The number of homelessness applications in Argyll and Bute by area from 1st April 2022 to 28th March 2023



A chart showing the number of homelessness applications in Argyll and Bute by area from 1st April 2022 to 28th March 2023.

Source: Argyll and Bute Council March 2023.

- Large households- 32% of households with three or more children are in relative poverty. The Local Housing Strategy aims to provide families with access to housing that is the right size to meet their needs. Research shows that children who live in overcrowded housing find it challenging to find a place to do homework and study, negatively impacting their life chances and keeps them trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In March 2023, 150 households on the HOMEArgyll waiting list needed a home with four or more bedrooms. This equates to 15% of households with children requiring a home with four or more bedrooms.

Number of households with children in Argyll and Bute by bedroom size in March 2023

No of households with children under 16	Minimum bedroom size required
3	One bed
505	Two bed
316	Three bed
150	Four+ bed

Source: Abris (Argyll and Bute's Joint Housing Register) March 2023

- Families with a disabled family member- 29% of households with a disabled family member are in relative poverty. In Argyll and Bute, considerable work is undertaken to meet the needs of families with a disabled member. This includes:
 - o In 2022-2023, building 24 new wheelchair homes and 25 homes are suitable for disabled people who do not require a wheelchair spec home.
 - o A full-time Housing Occupational Therapist (OT) has been employed to work within the housing service to ensure needs are met through the design of new-build housing or by adapting existing public and private sector homes. Children and young people with particular needs will benefit from the bespoke person-centred approach provided by the Housing OT.
 - o The number of households seeking advice regarding 'Accommodation Unsuitable – Mobility / Adaptations Issues' has decreased from 82 to 64 in Argyll and Bute from 1st April 2022 to 28th February 2023.

Housing Condition

The housing condition in Argyll and Bute does not compare favourably with the Scottish average. A higher proportion of homes are in poor condition and fail to meet tolerable standards, mainly due to their failure to meet energy efficiency standards. Living in a cold home has been linked to several health conditions. These conditions often result in children missing school, and this has an impact on their life chances. Research suggests a relationship between poor housing and lower educational attainment. Hence, children living in poor housing are more likely to have lower educational attainment, which has a negative impact on children's life chances.

The Council supports discretionary repair and improvement work to private sector properties via the Private Sector Housing Grant. Housing associations carry out planned cyclical maintenance and improvement works on their stock and deliver necessary adaptations with investment from the Scottish Government.

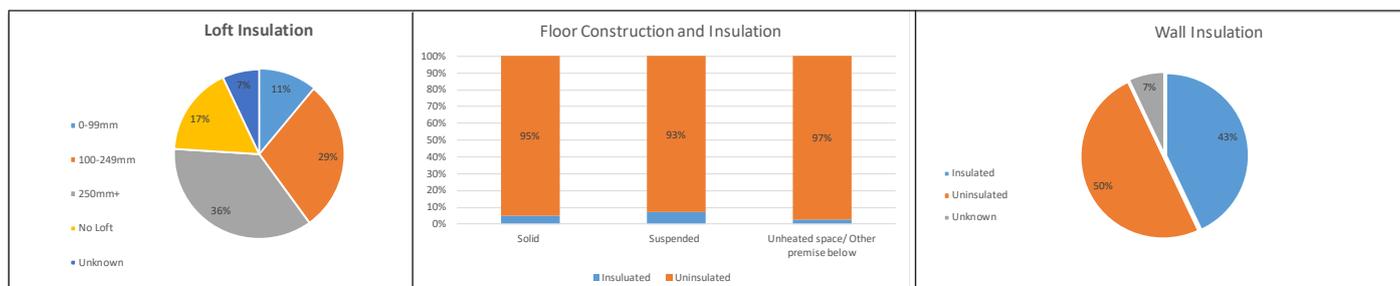
Energy efficiency and affordable warmth

Homes in Argyll and Bute need considerable works to be done to improve insulation measures, as figure * shows only:

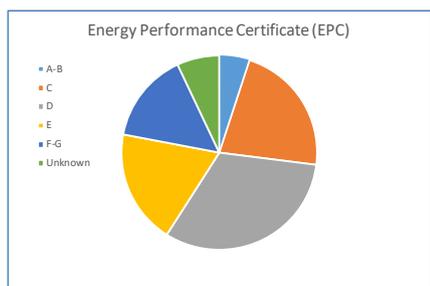
- a third have adequate loft insulation;
- 50% have insulated walls;
- 3-7% have floors insulated

Four charts showing levels of insulation in houses across Argyll and Bute.

Insulation measures in Argyll and Bute homes as of March 2023.



Source: Home Analytics



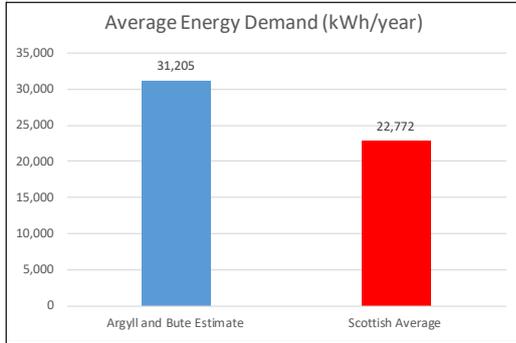
Source: Home Analytics

A similar picture emerges when the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings for Argyll and Bute are assessed. Figure * shows that less than a third of homes are rated EPC band C or higher.

The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings for homes in Argyll and Bute in March 2023.

Poor housing condition, coupled with homes with poor EPC ratings and low insulation levels, create homes requiring a more significant amount of heat to feel comfortable, as can be seen by figure *.

Average Energy Demand (kWh/year) in Argyll and Bute and Scotland in March 2023.



A chart showing Average Energy Demand (kWh/year) in Argyll and Bute and Scotland in March 2023.

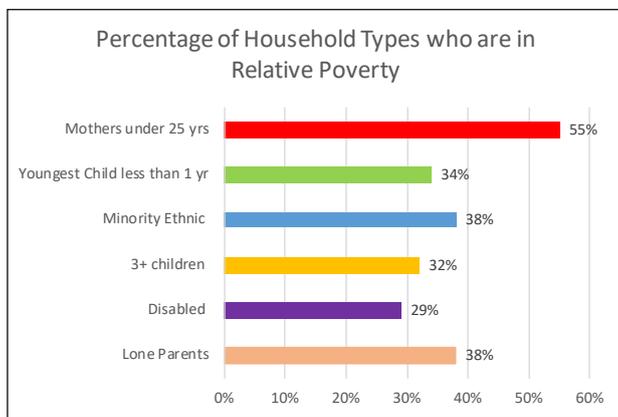
Key:
Argyll and Bute ■

Source: Home Analytics

2022-2023 has been characterised by record high fuel prices adding hundreds and, in some cases, over a thousand pounds to a household’s energy bills. High fuel costs combined with homes in Argyll and Bute requiring more heat to feel comfortable than homes in other parts of Scotland will likely push many families into poverty. Figure * shows that Argyll and Bute has high levels of fuel poverty, with 30% of households in March 2023 being in fuel poverty and 25% in extreme fuel poverty.

The percentage of households in fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty in Argyll and Bute in March 2023.

A chart showing The percentage of households in fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty in Argyll and Bute in March 2023



Source: Home Analytics

Improving our understanding of child poverty in rural and island Scotland report states that:

“fuel costs are known to be a particular contributor to fuel-related poverty in rural and island communities (for various reasons, including, on average, larger and older housing stock and more homes that are off-mains gas grid meaning that households are more reliant on expensive oil or electric heating), so interventions for focusing on reducing costs for these households might be particularly helpful. These might include, for example, schemes to improve house insulation to reduce energy bills.”

The LHS outlines a series of actions to reduce energy consumption, such as:

The SHIP Programme- Houses developed through the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) are built to the ‘Greener Standards’, which ensure high energy efficiency levels. In this authority, Registered Social Landlords (RSL) pioneered the development of the innovative Passivhaus model of housing at Innellan in Cowal. Another RSL has utilised SHIP funding to finance a new Passivhaus scheme in Garelochhead. These schemes require the home to have a 75% reduction in space heating needs than a typical new build home. Several other energy efficiency measures and initiatives are being developed and piloted within SHIP new builds. From December 2023, homes built through the SHIP programme will have even higher insulation levels than the ‘Greener Standard’ requires. However, new build homes only account for a small portion of the housing stock.

Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES)- To tackle fuel poverty, the Scottish Government has placed a duty on all local authorities to develop a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and delivery plan. The council will publish its LHEES in 2023-24. This strategy and delivery plan will provide a framework to accelerate works to improve the building fabric and ensure there is a plan to reduce the amount of heat required by a home. What this means in practice is that the home will need less energy to reach a comfortable temperature, lowering heating bills and helping to alleviate child poverty.

HEEPS and Warmer Homes- the Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland: Area Based Scheme (HEEPS: ABS) is financed by the Scottish Government and managed by the council. This scheme offers residents in Council tax bands A-C properties energy efficiency measures. The scheme is also open to properties in higher council tax bands, which were extremely energy inefficient. Argyll and Bute Council was awarded £2,371,323 for the HEEPS: ABS programme for 2022/23. The current programme runs until 30th June 2023, and all funding is expected to be spent. The programme has spent £930,269 on insulation measures in 163 homes in Argyll and Bute. In 2021-2022, 186 homes received energy efficiency measures investing £1,081,705 into the housing stock.

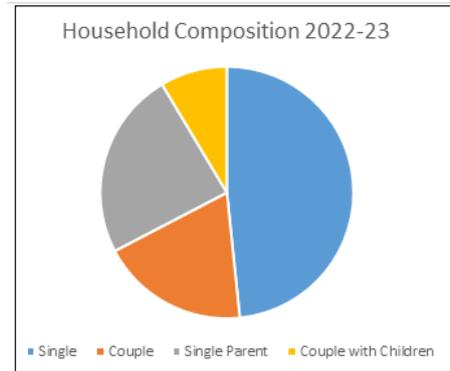
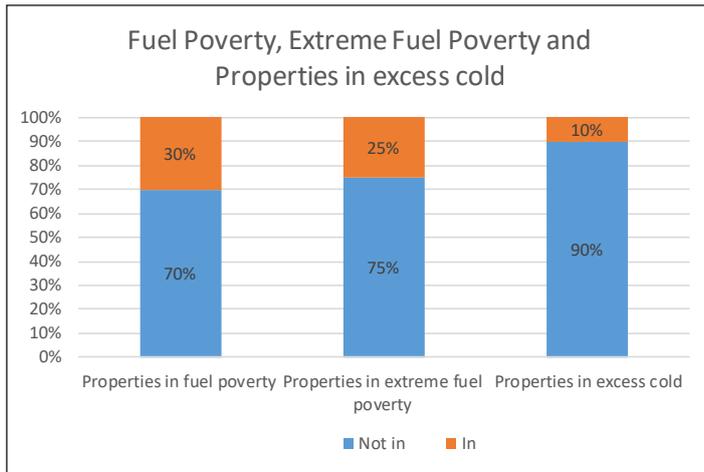
The Scottish Government also awarded £2.2 million to Argyll and Bute in December 2022 to assist the council and Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA) in delivering more energy-efficient homes, thus reducing household fuel bills. This project will insulate mixed tenure blocks of properties in Lorn, Tarbert, Bute and Cowal. The funding will also contribute towards an insulation and regeneration project in Ardrishaig.

Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (EESH) - Social housing landlords have been carrying out works in their housing stock to improve their energy efficiency. Most homes owned by social landlords now meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH), with most landlords having over 90% of their stock meeting the standard

Allenergy - Fuel Poverty

Argyll, Lomond and the Islands Energy Agency (Allenergy) continues to provide energy efficiency and affordable warmth advice to households in Fuel Poverty across Argyll and Bute. The majority of our work involves working intensively on a one-to-one basis with clients who come to us either via referrals or by themselves. Clients are first assessed for any immediate crisis interventions required. Crisis grants are accessed subject to availability and eligibility from a variety of sources. Depending on the source, payments could be in the form of prepayment meter vouchers; payments made direct to energy suppliers; cash payments; or provision of essential appliances such as white goods or other items as required. These payments have provided immediate relief and literally enabled people to get out of debt and put their heating back on. The service also helps to increase clients understanding of energy issues, save money on their ongoing costs and improve their resilience to fuel poverty going forward, by providing comprehensive home energy advice offered by telephone and/or through home visits including on energy efficient behaviours, heating systems, appliances, meters, tariffs, bills, dealing with damp and condensation, and ensuring clients receive all energy bill discounts and schemes they are eligible for. The end result is an improvement in household finance, knowledge and understanding, resilience, comfort, health and wellbeing.

Two charts showing percentages of people in fuel poverty and who are in these families



As expected the number of enquiries increased as the colder weather set in. In 2022-23 many households were suffering from fuel poverty due to unaffordable energy prices. This is a particular problem across our large rural area, as mains gas is mostly not available, and other heating methods are usually significantly more expensive. We also have bad weather, poor housing and low incomes, all of which are challenging. We are seeing a larger number of clients than in previous years, and they are often in a worse state of desperation. We are seeing many more clients who simply can't afford to turn their heating on at all. Many are on prepayment meters which they are unable to top up, and they have suffered severely through the cold winter weather. With the end of the Energy Bills Support Scheme, we expect to see households struggle in spring into summer as there is still a need for heating in the West of Scotland. Families are reporting they are worried about the summer school holidays as children will be at home on devices and they will be cooking more.

In 2022-23 a third of the households seeking help with energy had children in the home, a quarter of ALLenergy's clients were single parents.

On average, we calculate the client gains achieved in 2022-23 to be worth an average of at least £500 per client, in a combination of accurately measured crisis intervention funds (~£200) and other estimated savings (~£300). Estimated savings are a combination of factors such as: lower bills as a result of behavioural changes; switching to new energy efficient appliances; changing tariffs or meters; installation of new technologies/gadgets; ensuring all clients receive all discounts and schemes they are eligible for; onward referrals for benefit checks, financial advice, Scottish Government funded insulation or new heating installs.

In 2022-23 ALLenergy's total client gain was over £180,000. ALLenergy's Flexible Fund provided direct energy payments and funds for white goods (fridge-freezer, washing machine, cooker, etc.) to 49 Single Parent Families totalling £16,300; direct energy payments to 94 households experiencing difficulty with energy debt and ongoing costs totalling £31,462; and direct energy payments and funds for white goods to 38 households with a cancer or other life limiting illness totalling £13,250. In March 2023 ALLenergy registered with Children in Need and were successful with 15 applications for households with children averaging £317 per award for white goods and household appliances. ALLenergy works with the Glasspool Trust to provide white goods (fridge-freezer, washing machine, cooker, etc.) and were successful in 2022-23 with 28 applications totalling £8,165. The Fuel Bank Foundation awarded ALLenergy clients 713 vouchers with a total value of £28,268. The Scottish Government funded Home Heating Support Fund awarded 129 ALLenergy clients a total value of £97,694 in direct energy payments and fuel vouchers.

Allenergy continue to work with Argyll & Bute Council, Bute Advice Centre and the Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum to deliver Argyll & Bute Council's Flexible Food & Fuel Fund. Since the launch of the fund in January 2020 the client gain has reached £2.5 million to the end of March 2023.

Free School Meals and Holiday Provision



Free school meals support for entitled pupils has remained a key way of tackling the cost of living challenges for families with children.

All children in receipt of 1140 hours of childcare in early years' settings receive a free school meal, along with free milk and a healthy snack.

Work continues to implement the extension of universal free school meals to all Primary school pupils, with all pupils in P1 – P5 now entitled to a free school meal, and from August 2023 children in P6 and P7 in receipt of the Scottish child payment will also be entitled to a free school meal.

Cash payments in lieu of free school meals for those in receipt on the basis of need have and will continue throughout all future holiday periods, funded by Scottish Government. In Argyll and Bute, the payment made is the equivalent of £3 per pupil per day, paid by BACS transfer.

Pupil feedback continues to be the basis for the development of school lunch menus, and they continue to meet the revised Food and Drink in Schools standards which came into effect in April 2021. The Catering Team appointed a Menu Development Assistant in the autumn of 2022, and one of their key roles is to work with pupils on menu design.

Free school meal uptake remains higher than the Scottish average, and work has been undertaken during 2022/23 to roll out a new cashless catering and online ordering facility, so that every child can access a meal in a non-stigmatising way that protects their identity. Through the new pre-ordering app, each child should also be able to have their preferred meal every day at lunchtime, while enabling conversations with parents around meal choices to become normalised.

The Council's Catering Service continues to hold its Soil Association Food for Life Served Here Award at Bronze level, demonstrating its commitment to providing locally produced, sustainable, ethical and locally prepared food, serving food that's good for pupil's health, for the environment and for the local economy. The Catering Team has also recently won a Health and Vitality Honour for its work around sustainability, and

mapping is underway to identify further opportunities for providing more local food through school meals while supporting community wealth building opportunities for our communities.

Food cost inflation as a result of EU Exit, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine continue to put significant pressure on both public sector food provision and on household finances.

Paid for School Meals

For pupils who currently pay for a school meal, over the past year there has been an increase in school meals debt, as reported by Aberlour Children’s Charity, underpinned by research from Heriot Watt University. The Council is applying the recently published Good Practice Principles for households with school meals debt, along with ensuring that discretionary school meals are available for children who need them when circumstances are appropriate.

Good Food Nation and Food Strategy

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act was passed in July 2022, placing a duty on Local Authorities to create, publish, consult on, deliver and implement Good Food Nation plans, which will help to create a more sustainable and just food system for everyone in Scotland. This plan will need to be reported upon every two years, and reviewed every five years.

The Local Good Food Plan has a number of key areas for inclusion within its scope:

Preparation is underway within the Council and a Project Lead has been appointed to develop and deliver this work. The scope of the Good Food Nation Act is broad, and will draw together a number of other plans, including the Child Poverty Action Plan, with a food lens, along with education, health and wellbeing, and other priority areas.

In addition to the scope of this Act covering child poverty, one of the key principles of the Act is that adequate food is a human right.



It is anticipated that the development of this plan will need to be undertaken during 2023/24, ready for consultation and publication in 2025.

In addition to this, the Scottish Government undertook consultation in December 2021 on the benefit of each Local Authority having a Local Food Strategy, which would cover issues such as growing food locally, and local food procurement. Officers from Argyll and Bute Council are members of the Scottish Government’s Steering Group for Local Food Strategies, and are helping to develop the trajectory of this work.

With both of these legal requirements either in place or in development, it is expected that the first ever Argyll and Bute Food and Drink Strategy, with food insecurity, community wealth building and public sector food being key components, will be published during this coming year.

Bute Advice Centre

Bute Advice Centre deliver welfare rights and money advice services to households across the region of Argyll & Bute. The service has never been more in demand, particularly throughout the Covid19 Pandemic and more recently the Cost of Living Crisis. Working closely with partner organisations staff are able to offer the holistic service clients need. Staff maximise the incomes of those with low incomes and ensure disabled individuals have access to financial support. We particularly target our services to the elderly, disabled, single parents and low income households.

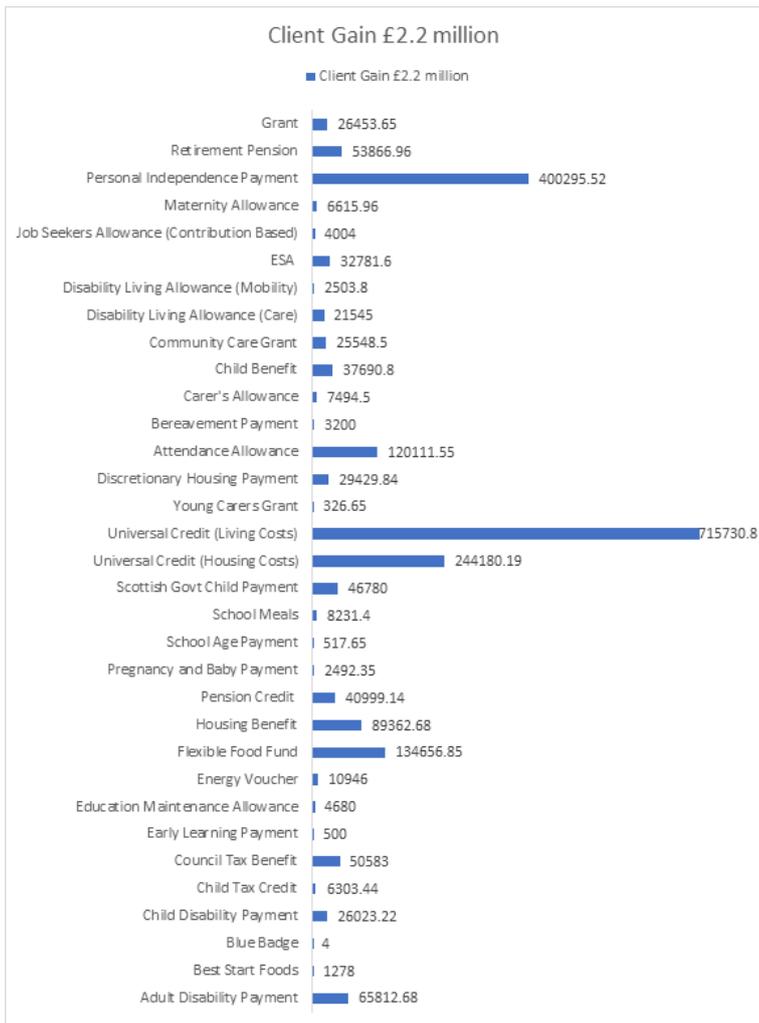
Do You Have Money Worries Book



Over the course of April 2022 to March 2023, 2500 copies of the book “Do You Have Money Worries” have been distributed across Argyll & Bute. The book was co-written by Bute Advice Centre and Allenergy and funded by Argyll & Bute Council. The purpose of the book was to give a brief overview of benefits, budgeting, energy advice, list of foodbanks and helpful advice and guidance. The book can be accessed digitally by logging on to:

[Money, bills and benefits \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](http://money, bills and benefits (argyll-bute.gov.uk)), Bute Advice Centre

Bute Advice Centre Client Gain for April 22-Mar 23 Across All Projects



Bute Advice Centre Projects

Flexible Food & Fuel Fund

The Flexible Food & Fuel Fund project began in January 2021, since then over 1658 cases have been opened. The project was designed to be a cash first approach to mitigate the Cost of Living Crisis facing households across the region. To be eligible applicants must have a low income and no access to savings. Payment is given over two instalments. The first when the applicant successfully applies and the second after engagement with Bute Advice Centre. When engagement is confirmed by Bute Advice Centre, the second payment is usually released 4 weeks after the first payment. The engagement with Bute Advice Centre will help to maximise the client's income through uptake of all grants, rebates and benefits that are appropriate. Money advice is also available. A referral is also made to Allenergy to ensure all energy advice and support can be offered. Thereby supporting the client in a holistic manner.

The rolling client gain over the term of the project is £2,381,461 a combined total figure from both Bute Advice Centre (£1,775,725) and Allenergy (£605,736) client gains.

Funding has been secured to allow the project to continue to support those in communities across Argyll & Bute who need financial help. Payments presently range from £160 for a single person up to £1300 for a couple with 5+ children.

Case Study

Client A is a young single woman, estranged from her father with little support from her mother who has addiction problems. The client had no budgeting skills, spending her benefits as soon as they reached her bank account. Support was given to increase her income and advice on budgeting to ensure that the last week of the month she still had power in her gas and electric meters, food in the cupboard and access to the internet. The client became very low when she was unable to contact friends using her phone, ensuring she had access to her phone for the majority of her socialising was incredibly important for her mental health. The client is now more focused on the future and has set up a course of study.

ACHA Welfare Rights

Bute Advice Centre continue to deliver the welfare rights services to ACHA tenants in the Bute & Cowal region as part of the ACHA welfare rights team. ACHA have been targeting those tenants who could benefit from increased income in terms of grants and benefits, particularly in relation to low income and disabled. The team meet regularly to update tenants through the face-book posts and the brochure shown on the website. Welfare Rights Officers have been providing tenants with Warm Bags, including warm blankets, tins of soup, insulated cups etc. All items that will help individuals who are worried about bills.

Resettlement Programme

Bute Advice Centre continue to support the Syrian community on Bute, offering support when needed with regard to welfare rights and money advice as part of Argyll & Bute Councils package. Additionally, staff support Sudanese and more recently Ukrainian families.

Parental Employment Support Fund

In December 2022, BAC staff began working with Inspiralba and partners delivering specialist welfare rights support to participants of the PESF programme. Helping parents who are unemployed or in low paid or low hour jobs to develop skills, build confidence and reach their potential in accessing employment or furthering their journey on the road to employment.

Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum



In December 2019 Bute Advice Centre was given Council funding to bring the foodbanks of Argyll & Bute together in a forum. The launch of the ABCFF took place in February 2020, just before the pandemic. The forum is an opportunity for the independent foodbanks to share expertise and encouragement. Since January 2021 Bute Advice Centre has worked with ALLenergy in providing a bespoke referral service for recipients of the foodbanks. Representatives from Bute Advice Centre and the Foodbanks regularly meet with Council staff to promote the flow of information between the agencies.

Foodbank	Information
Kintyre Foodbank	Kintyre Food Bank opens Tuesdays and Fridays from 10.30 - 11.30. Operating from Unit 3, Mull of Kintyre Industrial Est, Albyn Rd, Campbeltown. Pressures are rising numbers of those in need with diminishing supplies. The cost of living crisis is having a real impact on household budgeting in Campbeltown.
Bute Oasis	Food bank is open 10-4 each day on Argyll St, Rothesay. Numbers are still rising. The cost of living crisis is impacting on food prices is having a knock on effect on the cost of providing the service. Before price increases the average food spend for the food bank was £1350, this has now risen to £1850 per month. Despite the challenges, the foodbank was able to support rising numbers and provided over 100 households Christmas hampers and the Easter event provided families a fun day out with face painting, painting and decorating boiled eggs, sack races and hundreds of chocolate eggs being given out.
Hope Kitchen	Hope Kitchen in Oban also supports the Mull and Iona food bank. Alongside the foodbank operation it is a Community Hub offering innovative opportunities. Fellowship groups, beach cleans, lunch clubs, Crafting, Green shoots (gardening), Recovery Café for those in recovery from alcohol and drugs, Well Being Café, Music clubs and Quiz nights to name a few.
Tarbert Pantry	A Community Pantry Cupboard offers support to those in the Tarbert area. Supplies are also given to the Multiple Sclerosis support service. Services have been challenging to provide given the building has flooded and required extensive work done. Relocation had to take place in the Church Hall.
Helensburgh & Rosneath Food Bank	The Foodbank continues to see an increase in demand from those finding it difficult to feed themselves or their families during this time when both food and energy costs are increasing significantly, and wages and Benefit Payments remain stagnant. Food insecurity is primarily a result of not having enough income to meet the daily cost of living. During the last quarter from November 2022 until January 2023 we issued 841 x 5-day food bags to those members of our local community who came to the Foodbank in need of food. An increase of 21% compared to the same period last year when we issued 695 food bags. These bags supported the nutritional requirement of 1,162 adults and 576 children, a total of 1,729. There were almost twice as many children affected by food poverty in the quarter to 31/01/23 compared to the same quarter to 31/01/22, with parents requesting food to support 567 children compared to 294 in the previous year. An increase of 92.8%.

Foodbank	Information				
	Table 1: Most recent Quarter Year on Year Comparison				
	Time Period	01/11/22 to 31/01/2023	01/11/21 to 31/01/2022	Number Increase	Percentage Increase
	Food Bags Issued	841	695	146	21%
	Adults Supported	1162	861	301	34.9%
	Children Supported	567	294	273	92.8%
	Total Supported	1729	1155	574	49.7%
	Table 2: : The Full Year on Year comparison for year ending 31st October 2022				
	Time Period	Year Ending 31/10/2022	Year Ending 31/10/2021	Number Increase	Percentage Increase
	Food Bags Issued	2769	2137	632	29.6%
	Adults Supported	3482	2789	693	24.8%
	Children Supported	1423	787	636	80.8%
	Total Supported	4905	3576	1320	27.2%
	<p>Table 2 above shows that significantly more families with children required support in 2022 compared to the previous year and that there was an overall increase in attendances and food bags issued of 29.6% year on year. We continue to be very well supported by the local community with many individuals and organizations providing regular donations of food and cash. We currently have a good supply of most food items and a healthy financial reserve to maintain the current service level. Although, we are having to make bulk purchases for low stock items, as well a weekly purchase of fruit, vegetables, eggs and cheese to ensure a well-balanced bag of food. These are purchased from local suppliers and added to the non-perishable food items donated to us. We receive a batch of fresh bread donated by the Gingerbread Man for our Monday and Thursday sessions.</p> <p>We have recently recruited several new volunteers. Although, we remain concerned that if the demand continues to increase our current service model will become over stretched. Physical capacity and relying on a volunteer workforce of mainly retired older people will impose a limit on how much more we can do.</p> <p>We would like to see greater focus on Cash First initiatives with better support for those facing financial difficulties. Faster access to advice and debt management services as well as welfare benefit review to ensure people are receiving their full entitlement to benefits or grants is a better solution than a Foodbank. If people could access money to purchase food rather than relying on charitable food aid this would give them greater dignity and choice.</p>				

Foodbank	Information
Solar Tiree Foodbank	Provision of support through deliveries and food vouchers. Community Store cupboard that can be accessed in the phone box at Scaranish.
Dunoon foodbank	<p>The Dunoon foodbank tries to supply a cafe meal to all their clients who would like one. Formerly these meals were take-away, now they are eat-in at our new social space in Kirk Street, Dunoon (the old Youth Centre).</p> <p>The foodbank consists of two parts - one side aims to provide bags of food to take away for anyone who needs them, the other happens at the same time and consists of a hot meal cooked by our volunteers in our TINY kitchen. All clients can have both if required.</p> <p>On Thursday evening it varies, possibly soup, pie and beans, while Friday morning offers full breakfast or filled rolls, with tea and coffee always available. We also open a warm space on Tuesday afternoon, where you can also play pool or dominoes or knit and natter or learn chess.</p> <p>Full opening hours are Tuesday 1pm - 4pm (tea and coffee only), Thursday 4pm - 6pm, and Friday 0930 - 12mid.</p>
Jeans Bothy Helensburgh	A community hub project awarded “Community Project of the Year 2021” focussing on mental health and well-being offering a vast array of support and interests including mindfulness sessions, beach cleans, gardening, art classes etc., all in a bid to support recipients. As a part of that food parcels can also be issued.
Islay Food Bank	<p>Welfare Boxes are provided to anyone in need. Operates in a similar way to the Trussell Trust. Exact Items vary, but all boxes contain basic, store cupboard items. The box is designed to provide emergency meals for a few days.</p> <p>When you ask for a box we will ask if you require any additional items such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toiletries • Cleaning or Laundry Products • Nappies or Baby Food • Pet Food <p>We are also able to provide a small amount of fresh food such as bread, milk, fruit or vegetables if required.</p>

Free Period Products

Argyll and Bute's free period product initiative, **My Tribe**, officially launched in August 2022. **My Tribe** is the innovative free period product initiative across Argyll and Bute. As a bespoke brand, they have products available in over 150 community locations, with free online ordering & delivery to any household in Argyll & Bute, with plans to reach many more in the area.

In schools they have designed the **My Tribe Champions** initiative, normalising **My Tribe** and period products in our young population. Champions offer peer support to other pupils, help to access products, and provide information.

Community Locations

Working with local businesses, third sector organisations, internal partners and community organisations, each location receives a supply of products, as well as a branding pack to help to display the products and promote the service in their local community.

My Tribe is available in:

- Food Banks
- Primary and Secondary Schools
- Public toilets & Council buildings
- Ports and Harbours
- Gypsy/Traveller sites

Utilising partnership working with MECOPP, **My Tribe** have developed an effective method of provision of period products to our Gypsy/Traveller communities. MECOPP support workers assist residents on sites to access the online ordering system, to place an order for products. This ensures they are able to access reusable products, which are available online only. This was felt to be the most inclusive approach to access.

- Refugee communities

Working with our resettlement teams, **My Tribe** have created translated literature to inform our refugee community on ways to access products. This includes translation into Ukrainian, Russian and Arabic. They also distributed products via the resettlement team to our Ukrainian refugees placed into hotels.

- Gyms/libraries/community centres
- Island Communities/Airports

My Tribe have a provision on 15 of the 23 inhabited islands in Argyll. The remaining 8 islands have a population of <12 inhabitants and may not include menstruating individuals. This provision includes some of the island airports.

- Independent locations

This includes premises like shops, restaurants and post offices in rural and very rural areas. It ensures that as many small, rural locations are encapsulated in their provision. It also includes places like church halls, community groups and community centres and nurseries.

- Women's refuges
- Children's homes
- Oban Mountain Rescue
- Tiree Music Festival

Schools

Following a young person's consultation (aged <18), almost 40% of responders said they were too embarrassed or shy to access the free period products that were on offer at the time (before **My Tribe** was launched). 42% said that having to ask someone for products would be a barrier to access. Due to misuse and vandalism of products, many schools had withdrawn free access in school toilets, and had them in other places, often where young people had to ask for them. It is also a directive of the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 that those who need to access products should not have to ask for them. A resolution was sought to try to tackle these conflicting scenarios and the **My Tribe Champions** initiative was created.

The **My Tribe Champions** initiative normalises **My Tribe** and period products through a peer support program. Champions are identified by the schools and are trained on how to access products/ information. Each Champion is responsible for helping others access products, in school, in their community and online. They also educate people on types of period products available, including the promotion of reusable products, and which products are available from where.

They are tasked with identifying and reporting irresponsible behaviour in relation to period product misuse. We hope this will reduce the instances of these types of problems in schools and the community.

The **My Tribe Champions** initiative promotes leadership and confidence, supporting others, altruism, practicing having difficult conversations, & compassion.

Online Ordering

To ensure those who need to access products can be prepared for periods, **My Tribe** created a website **MyTribe** - Free period products (mytribeargyll.co.uk). The website offers free online ordering & delivery to any household in Argyll & Bute with larger quantities of single use products, such as pads and tampons, as well as the option of reusable pads and menstrual cups. All for free.

All products, including single use products are environmentally friendly, with no plastics, chemicals or toxins and are made from plant based materials such as cotton and bamboo.

Orders are placed, which is then processed via the **My Tribe** team. This is then sent to their suppliers who distribute the orders directly to each household.

The website also has a locations search function to find a local period product location. Potential locations can also get in touch to request to become a stockist.

D. Helping Families in Other Ways

liveArgyll Community Learning

Digital Connectivity for Community Learning and Development (CLD)

The CLD Strategic Partnership, which includes various partners from Public Sector, Third Sector is currently in year two of its four year Strategic Plan. The aim of the partnership is to working together to improve lives across Argyll and Bute by empowering individuals and communities to lead sustainable, fulfilling and happy lives through continuous learning, cooperative problem solving and removing barriers to engagement, health and wellbeing.” One of the areas being focused on is “Digital Skills”.

Extensive feedback from a number of consultations highlights that learners and communities require further support to access digital devices as well as be supported to utilise devices and further develop skills as part of Covid19 recovery. As a result a multi - agency digital skills work stream group has been established to identify need, develop and deliver actions and monitor and evaluate these under the digital skills work stream within the CLD Partnership Plan

A key piece of work which this group has undertaken is to undertake a piece of research, involving an external consultant, to help the partnership understand what Essential Digital Skills support exists and what is needed across Argyll and Bute. The focus of this review was on Digital Skills for Life and Work. These skills are essential to progress towards employment and manage day to day responsibilities. The next phases of the Digital work Stream group, will look at the results of the consultation, and plan to support areas of need.

Youth Participation

Youth Participation continues to be a priority for the Community Learning service. Article 12 of the UNCRC states it is a right that children, as embodied in the Lundy model, have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence. liveArgyll has a number of initiatives this year including Youth Action Groups and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Youth Action Groups (YAG)

Youth Action Groups have continued throughout the last year, and are being supported across six locations over Argyll and Bute.

There are three key aims for these groups:

1. To deliver an informal youth work activity that will support recruitment, engagement and relationship building.
2. To develop youth participation through a programme of personal development and capacity building opportunities for young people.
3. To provide social and recreational activities.

YAG should be a safe space where young people have fun, build relationships and explore issues relevant to them and their communities. They will provide a focal point for the delivery of locality based personal development and capacity building opportunities for young people. They will consult with young people on their interests, needs and how they want to respond to those needs.

To support young people to engage and participate meaningfully we run a training programme twice a year. They will attend a training weekend at an Argyll and Bute Outdoor Centre where the local Members of the Scottish Youth parliament along with Youth workers will provide Youth Participation Training.

Scottish Youth Parliament

liveArgyll supported and mentored Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) throughout the last year. This included carrying out roadshows across Argyll and Bute, attending sittings of the Scottish Youth Parliament across Scotland, and undertaking work on “Welcome to Your Vote Week”. These MSYPs are also engaged in various council and local planning groups, and supported the consultation process for the “Improving lives in Argyll and Bute” survey.

Cost of living Related Activities

Cowal, Bute and Oban ran activities associated with health eating and budget management. In response to the current cost of living crisis, the emphasis of the programme was heavily weighted towards young people understanding the cost of living, and how it impacts them and their families in their day to day lives.

Learning Hubs

In partnership with Skills Development Scotland and the Department of Work and Pensions, liveArgyll have been supporting young people who are transitioning from School into work and further education and wider life through drop in “learning hubs”. These hubs offer young adults (16+) the opportunity to learn new skills, increase employability confidence, and develop life skills.

Maternity

Maternity Services continue to offer as much care close to home as we can to reduce travel for our families. We provide a flexible, family centred service and can see people at home and initial appointments via NearMe have proved successful allowing for more inclusion. Care is co-ordinated by a Primary Midwife, no matter how complex a pregnancy is. There is a universal approach to needs and wellbeing. This includes money matters, welfare rights, benefits, housing, travel, physical and mental health assessments. Information and leaflets are discussed and are available on our Badgernet electronic record. Hard copies are available for the few families who do not access the app.

Baby box info, pregnancy vitamins and statutory Maternity paperwork is issued and discussed routinely by Midwives

The new Perinatal and Infant Mental Health service further supports this model and Maternity has identified Champions to support teams and training around this. We have worked closely with key stakeholders to offer a more joined up service, with parents at the centre of this.

We have developed stronger links with our Consultant Unit in GG&C since the last review. This has had a positive impact on supporting families and streamlining services. Awareness of services we can provide in Argyll and Bute has improved. This allows for earlier discharge and reduced travel and accommodation costs for families.

Local groups and classes are resuming and offered universally this reduces isolation and improves peer support. However, there is still the option for 1:1 sessions and group online sessions which reduces inequalities in the more remote and rural areas.

What is Infant Mental Health?

Mental health starts in infancy, it is a unique critical time of growth and development and babies growing brains are shaped by their experiences. A healthy mind is as important as a healthy body for a baby. Mental Health for infants means having consistent and nurturing relationships with parents or carers; developing the ability to manage emotions; being interested and curious and being able to explore and learn about their world around them. This early period of an infant's life is a key determinant of their future intellectual, social and emotional wellbeing. Good early relationships can provide a 'buffer' which helps to protect infants from other adversities in their life. Most parents want to do what is best for their babies but some live in situations that make this harder. Stress factors such as but not limited to mental health, substance misuse, domestic violence, unresolved trauma and poverty can make it harder for carers to protect, support and promote an infant's development. Almost invariably this calls for complex multi-agency working allowing for support of the parent's problems and anxieties whilst the infant mental health service focuses on the health and development of the infant through their relationships and environment.

What is the Infant Mental Health Service?

The infant Mental Health Service was set up just under one year ago. We are a small service aligned closely with the perinatal service, child health services and the 3rd sector. We will work with infants from birth up to 3rd birthday which will include targeted work with families experiencing early difficulties whose needs cannot be met by universal services alone, and specialist therapeutic work with families experiencing severe, complex and/or enduring difficulties in their early relationships, where babies' emotional wellbeing and development is particularly at risk. The service is made up of a full time permanent Parent-Infant Therapist, covering all Argyll & Bute.

What do we offer?

We will offer a range of evidence-based interventions catering to the need of the infant referred to our service. This includes Video Interactive Guidance (VIG), Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Watch, Wait and Wonder, Metallization with parent-Infant, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Infant Massage and Circle of Security. A referral may lead to direct work with the parent-infant dyad or lead to sign posting to another service or supporting another service to work with the dyad, or may lead to a professional consultation. We will meet with parents/carers and their infants for an initial appointment to find out how we can support them and their baby. Further sessions will aim to help gain a deeper understanding of family dynamics and how they care for their infant's emotional needs and discover new ways of thinking about their infant and their relationship. We can visit families at home or somewhere convenient, such as a local health centre. We will use our expertise to help the local workforce to understand and support all parent-infant relationships, to identify issues where they occur and offer the appropriate support.

How to contact us

Email: nhsh.abimh@nhs.scot

Tel: 07977140752

Consultation with LGBTQ+ young people

The Educational Psychology Service has launched a consultation survey to gather the views of young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and explore their perception of mental health support services and how support could be improved. The results and recommendations of this research will be shared with schools across Argyll and Bute and with the wider education community to raise awareness of the successes and challenges raised. It is hoped that this research will help make schools a more positive, safe, and inclusive place for all pupils to learn.

Working with Refugees in Argyll and Bute

The Council's Resettlement Team works in partnership with other organisations through the Refugee Programme. Work began in 2015 and began with Syrian resettlement, a UK wide scheme whereby local authorities provided accommodation and support. In Argyll and Bute Syrian families and individuals were found homes on the island of Bute and organisations worked together to provide multi-agency, person centred support. This programme continues today and now includes other nationalities; it has proven highly successful, winning a number of awards, including COSLA Excellence Awards and is seen as a benchmark settlement programme.

Work with Ukrainian families is different as it is community based but still resettlement led. Support remains multi-agency and person centred. Some 300 Ukrainian citizens have been welcomed to Argyll and Bute under two different schemes. With the "Homes for Ukrainians" UK Government backed scheme people match with a sponsor in the UK; it is the task of the local authority to complete checks on the prospective sponsors.

The second scheme for Ukrainian people was set up by the Scottish Government and will provide places for up to 45,000 people. They are placed in hotels across Scotland and local authorities match them with sponsors from there. Challenges may arise in the future with the need to identify longer term accommodation for everyone. To date this has been successfully managed in Argyll and Bute and no one has been identified as statutorily homeless. The Council's Resettlement Team has been scaled up to provide support for Ukrainians and this has included:

- Housing;
- Interpreters;
- English Lessons;
- Employability support;
- Benefits and Grants;
- Physical and mental health supports and counselling.

Outcomes for people placed across Argyll and Bute are good and provision provided is a notable example of effective multi-agency partnership working.

What are Carers Centres and MAYDS doing to support Young Carers in Argyll & Bute?

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 requires Argyll and Bute HSCP to provide all young carers with a Young Carers Statement and support tailored to their specific needs. To meet the requirements of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and to support our young carers in Argyll and Bute, we have taken steps to promote awareness of young carers in Argyll and Bute including development of an app to support the completion of young carers' statements.

Awareness sessions and information have been shared with all stakeholders including children and young people to raise awareness of young carers, in addition a poster has been created aimed at identifying young carers to encourage them to access support. To improve awareness and support, processes have been implemented within education to ensure young carers can be recorded on SEEMIS.

Throughout this development we continue to ensure that Young Carers voices are heard and are continued to be listened too as we move forward with youth participation. Argyll & Bute HSCP has excellent relationships with the Carers Centres who are contracted to carry out responsibilities of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 Young Carers Statements.

Transforming Responses to Violence against Women and Girls

In 2021 the Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership was successful in gaining a grant of £68,852.40 from the Developing Equally Safe Fund for a project called: Transforming Responses to Violence against Women and Girls. This two year project is focused on rolling out the Safe and Together Model across Argyll and Bute. This model aims to ensure that more children remain safe and together with the non-offending partner in cases of domestic abuse. It also places a focus on the perpetrators to take responsibility for their actions and impact on their children. The project also involves a number of other training elements aimed at giving workers the skills and knowledge they need to better deal with domestic abuse and other forms of gender informed violence. Research is also being carried out looking at the views of staff, survivors of domestic abuse and perpetrators. In the period 2022 – 2023 the outcomes for the project were as follows:

- 25 Children and Families Social Workers commenced their Safe and Together Core Training;
- 15 Managers and Supervisors from Social Work, commenced their Safe and Together Core Training and Management Training;
- 22 other training courses were delivered to staff (MARAC, DASH, Awareness Raising, Routine Enquiry, Police Dealing with Domestic Abuse, Harmful Traditional Practices, and Dealing with Disclosure of Sexual Assault). Number of attendees at these courses was 392.
- Research was completed with staff and survivors of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is a driver of child poverty and the work of this project should lead to earlier and more effective intervention and better outcomes for children and survivors.

E. Other Planned Work

Rural Growth Deal

Tourism – Creating a World Class Visitor Destination - proposal is to open up access to Argyll’s coasts and waters to develop Argyll as a West of Scotland “must visit” location for the maritime leisure market. Proposals will also build on a phased process of regeneration in some of our key coastal towns and we are working closely with local communities to maximise opportunities for inclusion and well-being. This includes working to deliver enhanced marine training opportunities for local school children.

Creating a Low Carbon Economy – Explore options for the decarbonisation of Islay with a focus on improving energy efficiency of domestic properties. The Council and strategic partners are working to develop a bespoke and innovative scheme that will address island issues and deliver a just transition towards a net zero and climate resilient island economy in a way that delivers fairness and tackles inequality. Local green skills and supply chain opportunities will also be a central pillar of this project.

Rural Skills Accelerator Programme - Inclusive Growth lies at the heart of City Region and Growth Deals and this Deal will drive future inclusive economic growth and tackle inequality with a strong focus on community wealth building, STEM skills, rural enterprise and the delivery of local education services. The Rural Skills Accelerator Programme is a vehicle that will provide the 21st century infrastructure and delivery mechanisms needed for skills, training, education and enterprise to facilitate collaborative growth in the rural economy.

Housing to Attract Economic Growth - The housing element of the Rural Growth Deal proposes to provide affordable housing of the right type and in the right place to support growing business sectors.

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Clyde Engineering and Innovation Cluster - Through the Rural Growth Deal Argyll and Bute Council is seeking to maximise the local and national benefits of the Ministry of Defence £1.3bn Maritime Change Programme. The focus is on providing bespoke commercial and businesses accommodation proximate to the base as well as enhanced innovation and skills infrastructure.

West Coast UAV Logistics & Training Hub - This intervention involves working in partnership with industry leading research institutions to create an innovative research and development centre for unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technologies on the west coast of Scotland. This will create the West Coast of Scotland’s first dedicated drone training centre with indoor facilities specialising in developmental, test and operational facility for UAV technologies. This facility could enhance the provision of services to local island communities following on from successful pilots working with NHS Highland and the Royal Mail. Another potential use being considered is delivery of school meals to remote and island schools.

Marine Aquaculture Programme – This is a programme of projects aimed at making Argyll and Bute the leading region for innovation in marine aquaculture in Scotland, UK and globally, by underpinning sustainable, inclusive business growth through investment in world-class marine science and technology.

We are still working towards signing the Full Deal Agreement for the Rural Growth Deal and it is hoped to achieve this key milestone later in 2023. Given that the RGD is not yet in the delivery stages, the impact on child poverty and well-being to date has been limited however, moving forward it is anticipated that the Rural Growth Deal can be a key driver for local inclusive economic growth, community wealth building and well-being. The Deal can also help support a just transition to net zero within the region.

A key focus of the Creating a Low Carbon Economy project is helping to reduce high levels of rural fuel poverty. This is likely to include improved energy efficiency measures in local housing stock to try and reduce energy consumption / costs. The RGD funding will also seek to provide additionally to existing energy efficiency schemes to maximise the funding available.



The RGD housing project is focused on providing affordable housing with a mix of tenures required to support local people and workers in some of our most rural communities. Housing will also be constructed to be as efficient as possible to reduce energy costs and we aim to ensure that potential sites are located close to local amenities to reduce the requirement for travel.

Digital inclusion is a key driver behind our RGD digital project. We will look to enhance digital connectivity across the region and facilities such as the STEM hubs may also include community spaces which will be fully digitally connected. We are investigating the potential to utilise fibre and 5G connectivity to provide immersive, interactive learning environments for local school children. We will also try and maximise community benefits from any digital investment via the RGD.

The Rural Skills Accelerator Programme includes a focus on providing enhanced STEM education for local school children which will be delivered via a series of physical STEM hubs and associated outreach activity to ensure all local schools can benefit from this.

A key focus of the wider RGD programme will also be growing local skills, training and job opportunities in growth sectors such as the blue economy, defence and tourism. We will invest in key infrastructure such as a new Marine Industry Training Facility at Dunstaffnage, commercial and innovation space serving the expansion of HMNB Clyde, enhancing UHI Argyll College's estate in Dunoon and a series of STEM Hubs across the region. This will provide enhanced opportunities for people to train or study locally helping to attract and retain economically active individuals that are required to support growth in key local employment sectors.

We will also be undertaking a series of marine tourism and place based regeneration projects that should enhance infrastructure in a number of our key coastal towns and villages. This will include measures to improve civic pride by providing enhanced community spaces, new active travel links and associated employment opportunities (e.g. linked to growth in tourism, construction, apprentices etc.). The Council are also working to deliver an enhanced water sports training facility in Campbeltown, which will expand opportunities for local school children and adults to marine training and leisure activities. Campbeltown Grammar School has been a key collaborator with this project in recent years, and delivering the new facility will better enable Kintyre Sea Sports to grow the well-established partnership with Campbeltown Grammar School thereby expanding maritime training opportunities to more school pupils.

Useful Source Reading

UK Poverty 2023: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; 26th January 2023

Life at Age 14: initial findings from the growing up in Scotland study; Children, Education and Skills; Social Research

Child Poverty in Scotland: health impact and health inequalities. NHS Health Scotland, 2018
The Cost of a Child in Scotland 2022 – Update December 2022; Donald Hirsch and Juliet Stone; CPAG Scotland.