Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2020-21

July 2021

Contents

Foreword 3
Introduction: 5
Children's Rights: 6
The UNCRC Articles that apply to the Wellbeing Indicators 7
Reasons for this Child Poverty Review: 8
Sustainability: 9
The Picture in Argyll and Bute: 9
Child Poverty 9
Employment 10
Jobs at Risk 10
Earnings by Place of Residence 2020 11
Island Poverty 14
Key Areas of the Plan: 16
A. Increasing Income from Employment and Earnings: 16
B. Increasing Income through Benefits: 29
C. Cost of Living: 33
D. Helping Families in Other Ways: 42
E. Partnership Working: 48
F. Other Future, Planned Work: 53

Foreword

Welcome to the second review of Argyll and Bute's Child Poverty Action Plan. It looks back on a year that has been challenging to us all. It has seen our children and young people being home schooled for significant periods and parents, many of them furloughed or working from home, facing the challenge of supporting them whilst coping with financial difficulties.

Through all of the events of this last extraordinary year Argyll and Bute's people and communities have done what we know they do best, come together to make sure that we are all ok. People have volunteered to help those who are shielding or just need to talk, and families have been there for each other, albeit sometimes virtually. Staff too have gone the extra mile with Teachers and Educational Psychologists working with our children and health and Social Care staff working to continue to provide vital services. Many across the Council have taken on extra Covid related tasks or assumed new roles, showing optimism in the face of adversity. As well our third sector partners have worked tirelessly, in so many settings. Argyll and Bute may be a beautiful place, but its people make it a great place to live.

This year has also seen a continued focus on tackling child poverty; the local multi-agency Child Poverty Action Group has worked to make a difference in key areas such as: food supply, employability, benefits, advice services and cost of the school day. This review highlights that work and achievements like the Flexible Food Fund and our advice services achieving £9,129,380 in client gain.

We will be reviewing and monitoring the impact of the pandemic in the forthcoming year and will continue to closely review the economic, social and health impacts on our communities.

We will champion children's rights and It remains our objective to see our local children access the best opportunities to support them to develop their potential and as adults continue to live and work in a vibrant Argyll and Bute.

We have no hesitation in recommending this review which highlights the excellent multi-agency and partnership work being undertaken. We would continue to ask you to support the Children's Strategic Group to ensure they can continue to tackle the inequalities which are so damaging to our young people and to their futures.

Fiona Davies
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Argyll & Bute Health and Social Care Partnership
Chair Children's Strategic Group

Pippa Milne

Chief Executive

Argyll & Bute Council

Pam Dudek

Chief Executive

NHS Highland Health Board

Introduction:

Welcome to the second annual review of Argyll and Bute's Child Poverty Action Plan 2020 - 2021. We have all experienced the impacts of Covid-19 over the last few month and now more than ever it is important to show how we are working to address child poverty in Argyll and Bute and what progress we are making despite the increased challenges.

It is already clear that low income families – who reported lower levels of financial resilience coming into this crisis – are at risk of deepening insecurity. In the months ahead, increased pressure from the withdrawal or disruption of care services puts parents and carers at risk of long-term reductions in earnings, or of being pushed out of the labour market altogether. This presents a significant threat to women's equality in Scotland's labour market.

IPPR Scotland's report on Financial Insecurity in Scotland

https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-10/weathering-the-winter-storm-oct20.pdf

The Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Group recognises that it is vital that the Council, Health Board, the third sector and communities work together to tackle child poverty. Argyll and Bute's people demonstrated their ability to come together and support each other and the most vulnerable amongst us during the pandemic. Between 27th March and 26th July 2020, the Caring for People Group answered 4080 different requests for assistance. By the 7th May the Third Sector Partnership, working on behalf of the group, had registered 963 volunteers across our communities. Council, Health, Social Care and Education staff also stepped up, assuming new roles, longer hours and different ways of working.

Measures were quickly taken to ensure that those being shielded would be supported and food made available to children and families during lockdown. There was a shared understanding of the pressures that lockdown created, and School and Education Psychology staff kept in touch with pupils and parents, offering support and advice. As well the Violence against Women and Girls Partnership worked to give advice and support to women experiencing domestic abuse; for example, Women's Aid worked with the Housing Consortium to support women and children fleeing violence.

This review applauds the determination of Argyll and Bute's people to protect its families and communities, to ensure that no child is left behind and that it is understood that poverty is not the fault of those experiencing it. This is more than ever the case with young people struggling to find work and many families working long hours in low paid jobs; some facing the additional challenges of living remote and rurally. We may not all be in the same boat as some face additional challenges, but we can all pick up a paddle and make sure that everyone's boat stays afloat.

Despite all of the challenges and changes that Covid-19 and EU exit have brought to tackling child poverty, our vision remains:

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.

Children's Rights:

Article 27(1) – States 'Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. While this is the most relevant article of the UNCRC when thinking about child poverty, there are many other articles that are important.

The Scottish Government has committed to putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at the centre of decision making both politically and legally. The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 1st September 2020 and was passed unanimously on 16th March 2021.

In 2020 Argyll and Bute produced its own Children's Rights Report 2020 - 2023 and will use its principles when tackling child poverty. This demonstrates a commitment to the articles of the UNCRC and delivering them through The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) assessment approach (SHANARRI), which encompasses 8 Wellbeing Indicators (safe, Healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included). GIRFEC recognises that all children are unique, and that each child should be helped to reach their full potential. The National practice model incorporates the 8 well-being indicators into planning, decision-making and practice, and endorses the Articles of the UNCRC.

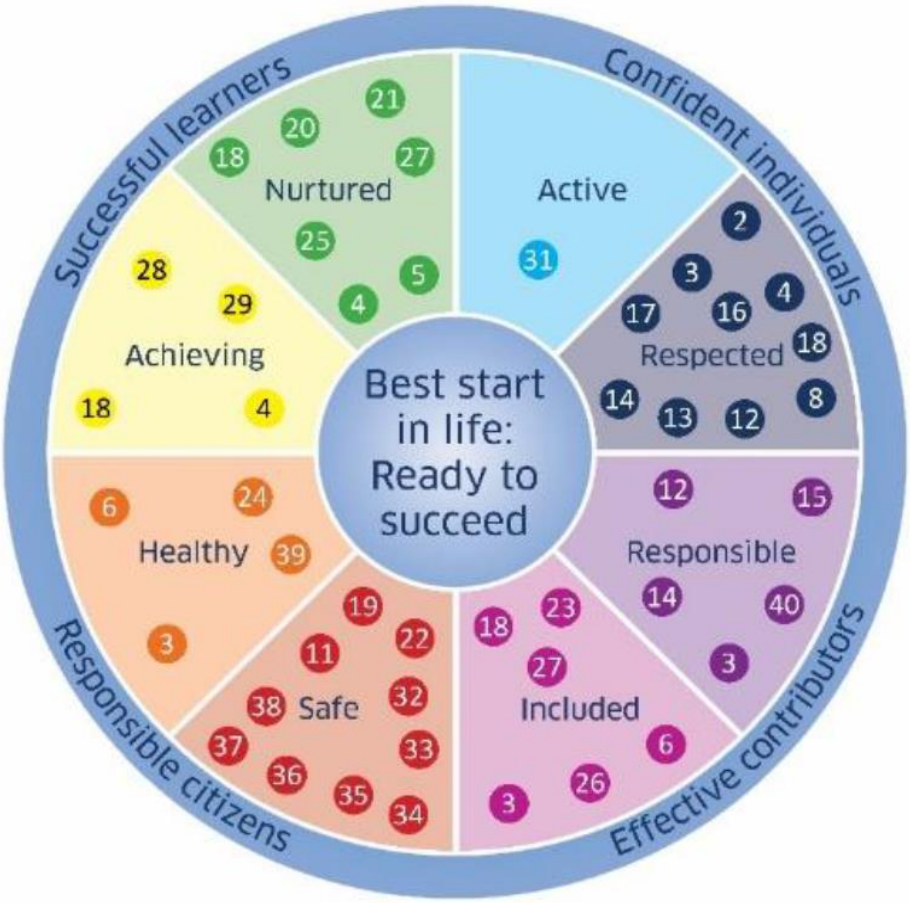
A range of experiences can have negative effects on young people; these are recognised in the work on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or other adversities such as bereavement or bullying, or where a family is affected by illness, disability or poverty.

https://www.gov.scot/publications/adverse-childhood-experiences/

A multi-agency group has been formed to look at how the Council and its partners can work together to achieve the integration of the UNCRC into services and practice. It will also look at how to engage with children and young people on children's rights and how they need to be supported to understand and embrace this change. Other issues to be looked at will include staff training on children's rights, UNCRC and how these impact

on the law. Links to community groups and media posts will be used to keep people informed of progress.

The UNCRC Articles that apply to the Wellbeing Indicators**:**



Links to Argyll and Bute's Child Poverty Action Report and 2019 / 2020 Review:

https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/child_poverty_action_plan_0.pdf

https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/child_poverty_action_plan_review.pdf

Link to Council's Challenge Poverty Website:

https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/challenge-poverty

Link to Argyll and Bute's Children's Rights Report:

https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/childrens_rights_report_2020_final.pdf

Scottish Government's UNCRC Guide for Children and Young People

https://www.gov.scot/publications/un-convention-rights-child-guide-children-young-people-2/

Reasons for this Child Poverty Review:

First and foremost, the reason for this review is to show how we are addressing child poverty. Argyll and Bute's Chief Officer for the Health and Social Care Partnership leads our local Child Poverty Action Group, a multi-agency group whose members include the Council Leader, Heads of Adult and Child Services, Health Managers and key people from: Employability, Benefits, The Food Group, Education, Public Health, Housing, Community Planning Partnership and the third sector. This group ensures that child poverty is prioritised and there is cooperation that encourages new ideas and initiatives.

This review also exists because 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. To evidence the need for such action the Scottish Government commissioned research which found that by 2030/31, if no action was taken, it was estimated that 38% of children would be in relative poverty, 32% of children would be in absolute poverty, 17% of children would be in combined low income and material deprivation and 16% of children would be in persistent poverty.

The 2017 Act set four targets relating to ending child poverty, which the Scottish Government committed to trying to achieve by 2030. The targets for children living in households in Scotland are that:

- 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).

These are all measured after housing costs are deducted. The Act also sets out interim targets which are to be met in the financial year beginning 1 April 2023 and these targets now represent a challenge given the impact of Covid-19.

- 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

Sustainability:

There are areas of work such as those tackling period poverty, school clothing, food and others which offer an opportunity for poverty actions and sustainability actions to be more closely aligned in a way that helps to tackle stigma while enabling dignity and choice for those in need. This is a future area of development that will be given further consideration in plans and actions.

The Picture in Argyll and Bute:

Child Poverty
Data from research by the charity “End Child Poverty” in October 2020, which includes the child poverty data published by the Department for Work and Pensions in March 2020 and housing cost data from the Valuation Office Agency and income data from the Understanding Society survey found the following.

Children Living in Poverty below 60% median income before housing costs (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC) in Argyll and Bute.

2014/2015 AHC – 20.7%

Note: This new data includes previous years from 2014/15. Due to a small technical adjustment in the official figures, past data are slightly different from those published previously.

2018/2019 BHC - 17.3%

2018/2019 AHC – 23.4% - (3056 children)

New Scottish Government figures released on 19/05/2021 show a very small decrease in child poverty figures for Argyll and Bute

2019/2020 AHC - 23.3% (3000 children)

Figures to be released next year will reflect the impact of the pandemic and are likely to be higher.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). If an area is identified as ‘deprived’, this can relate to people having a low income, but it can also mean fewer resources or opportunities. SIMD looks at the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing. They do help with regards to understanding where deprivation exists, but it needs to be remembered that there will be families and individuals who experience deprivation but live out with these areas. This will particularly be the case given the impact of Covid19 on employment and businesses.

The Results for Argyll and Bute from the SIMD 2016 shows:

- 4 data zones in the 10% most overall deprived data zones
- 11 data zones in the 20% most overall deprived data zones
- 9 data zones are in the 20% most income deprived data zones.
- 6 data zones are in the 20% most employment deprived data zones
- 6 data zones are in the 20% most health deprived data zones
- 10 data zones in Argyll and Bute in the 15% most overall deprived data zones.
- 8 data zones are in the 15% most employment deprived data zones.
- 12 data zones are in the 15% most health deprived data zones.
- 41,738 people live in the 53 data zones (38%) that are amongst the 15% most access deprived data zones.
- 13 of Argyll and Bute's data zones, more than 10%, are in the 1% most access deprived data zones.

These figures looked at by Ward show that our most deprived areas are; Bute, Dunoon, Helensburgh Central, South Kintyre and Oban South and the Isles (SIMD 2020V2).

Employment

In Argyll and Bute we face challenges presented by being the second largest local authority in Scotland geographically at 690,899 hectare and also the third most sparsely populated area with only 13 people per square kilometre or 0.13 per hectare compared to the Scottish average of 0.70 and along with its five towns it includes 23 inhabited islands. Whilst this brings benefits, recognised by the many tourists who flock to our area, it also means that we have fewer jobs in manufacturing and finance than is the Scottish national average and higher than average employment in the Public Sector, tourism, forestry and fisheries. The top 3 employment sectors in Argyll and the Islands are accommodation & food services (15.0%), human health and social work (15.0%) and wholesale and retail (13.3%). Together they account for around 13,000 jobs across the area. 13,750 people are employed in the sectors most exposed to the economic effects of COVID-19 (46%) of total employment - higher than the average regionally (39%) and nationally (37%).

Jobs at Risk

Analysis based on estimated share of jobs furloughed by sector in April 2020

The share of jobs in sectors most exposed to COVID-19 is higher in Argyll and the Islands than regionally and nationally. Argyll and Bute is ranked 21st out of Scotland's 32 local authorities on share of jobs in exposed sectors

Argyll and Bute is ranked 1st out of Scotland's 32 local authorities for jobs at risk.

The Impact of Covid19 on the Highlands and Islands; Sub-regional analysis; HIE 2021

NOMIS figures for January 2020 – December 2020 show that 77.2% of people in Argyll and Bute were economically active compared with 76.8% in Scotland. However, wages are noted to be lower in Argyll and Bute.

Earnings by Place of Residence 2020

	Argyll and Bute £	**Scotland £**	**Great Britain £**
Gross Weekly Wage			
Full Time Workers	553.6	595.0	587.1
Male Full-Time Workers	606.7	626.3	622.9
Female Full-time Workers	477.1	562.5	544.3
Hourly Pay – Excluding Overtime			
Full-Time Workers	14.64	15.63	15.18
Male Full-time Workers	15.60	15.87	15.64
Female Full-time Workers	13.54	15.31	14.42

Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis

Notes: Median earnings in pounds for employees living in the area.

The impact of the pandemic on incomes has been substantial with significant numbers losing their jobs or being furloughed. The Department of Work and Pensions reporting that In February 2021, there were 212,600 Universal Credit claimants in Scotland, an increase of 3,900 (1.9 per cent) over the month and an increase of 100,300 (89.3 per cent) over the year. (Economy and Labour Market: A National Statistics Publication for Scotland; Scot. Gov. March 2021).

In Argyll and Bute DWP noted that in December 2020 the live caseload for Universal Credit was 6,126 cases at 10 December 2020 before the most recent lockdown. 40% of these claimants are searching for work and a further 37% are working with or without requirements.

The impact of the pandemic on families with children in Argyll and Bute can be seen in figures for those claiming Crisis Grants. In the period 1 April to 31 December 2020 there was an increase of 19% in the volume of applications received and awards made and a 50% increase in their value. 357 claims are from households with children. 213 of these claims were successful thereby supporting 404 children in these households. This represents a 53% increase in the number of households with children being supported by Crisis Grant between 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 and a 56% increase in the number of children supported by the grant for this period of the year.

In the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there was an increase of 14% in the volume of applications received to the Scottish Welfare Fund from 2,314 to 2,627 and expenditure in the fund increased from £459,000 in 2019/2020 to £658,000 this year an increase of 43% year on year.

In the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there was an increase of 17.52% in the volume of applications for Community Care Grants from 812 to 968 with the expenditure of grants increasing by 41.95% from £387,284 in 2019/20 to £549,733 in 2020/21.

Spend and committed spend on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund at March 2021 sits at £852,000 but this will be subject to year-end adjustments still to be processed. Last year (2019/2020) £656,000 was spent, therefore there has been a 30% increase in spend year on year.

It is young people who are experiencing the most severe downturns in employment and employment opportunities. From August 2019 youth unemployment rates in Argyll and Bute rose to 525 in August 2020, an unemployment rate of 12%. This was above the Highlands and Islands (9.5%) and the national (9.7%) rates, suggesting barriers for young people wishing to enter the labour market.

The Impact of Covid-19 on the Highlands and Islands; Sub-regional analysis; HIE 2021

In January – December 2020, the employment rate for young people (16 to 24-year olds) in Scotland was 51.9 per cent, 6.0 percentage points lower than a year ago (57.9 per cent), which represents a statistically significant change. The employment rate for 16 to 24-year olds is now the lowest since the series began in 2004. The employment rate for young people had been gradually increasing since 2013 but has decreased over the last year, the largest decrease seen in a single year.

It does appear that unemployment rates for young women are increasing faster than for young men. In January – December 2020, the employment rate for young men (16 to 24-year olds) in Scotland was 4.9 % lower than a year ago. The employment rate for young women (16 to 24-year olds) in Scotland was 7.1 % lower than a year ago. (Economy and Labour: Scot Gov. March 2021).

On 20/04/2021 the ONS announced that In Scotland, there were 2.567m people aged 16-64 in employment, with 120,000 people in that age range being unemployed.

The tourist and hospitality sectors that traditionally employ large numbers of young people are badly affected and this is of concern to areas such as Argyll and Bute. It remains to be seen how tourist areas will bounce back following the ending of lockdown restrictions.

Lone parents may also be affected by this as a third of lone parents work in sectors, such as tourism, that experienced shutdown. The vast majority of lone parents are women and are more likely to be living in poverty. (Close the Gap, 2020; Improvement Service, 2020a). As with the rest of Scotland, women in Argyll and Bute have been particularly impacted on by the pandemic:

Women find it harder to escape poverty and are more likely to experience persistent poverty than men. There is a particularly high risk of poverty among disabled women, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, lone parents, and refugee women due to the additional barriers to economic resources and support services they face. A key factor to this is the gender pay gap, occupational segregation and women's over-representation in lower paid work which puts them at a greater risk of poverty. Due to women carrying out on average 60% more unpaid work than men, women have higher rates of part-time work than men.

Socio-economic Disadvantage and Protected Characteristics: Sex and Gender – Women. Improvement Service March.2021.

What's the evidence on women's different economic realities?

- Scotland's Gender Pay Gap is 13.3%, this is the difference between women and men's average earnings;
- Full-time equivalent rate for women was 42% compared to 58% of men demonstrating women's participation in the labour market is lower than men's;
- 85% of those who are deemed 'inactive' in the labour market due to caring responsibilities are women;
- 8% of women in employment aged over 16 were self-employed compared to 16% of men;
- Median hourly earnings for women was £11.81 per hour compared to £13.89 per hour for men;
- 78% of women earned the living wage or more compared to 84% of men;
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic women undertook 60% more unpaid work than men;
- Unemployment among women in Scotland increased at a higher rate than men at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Elected Members Briefing; Improvement Service; April 2021.

In addition, disabled people, particularly women, are more likely to experience poverty and less likely to be in employment.

They are also more likely than non-disabled people to work in sectors which have been hit hard by COVID-19, including public administration, education and health, as well as the distribution, accommodation and catering sectors. The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are, therefore, more likely to affect disabled people compared to non-disabled people. A survey carried out in the UK in April 2020 showed that disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to say that they will come out of the pandemic in more debt. 34% of disabled women said their household has already run out of money, compared to 24% of non-disabled women. Furthermore, research by GDA showed that among disabled people in Scotland, 57% have been worried about money and hardship during the pandemic.

(COVID-19 and Disabled People in Scotland - Health, Social and Economic Harms. Equality and Welfare; Social Research. Scot Gov. Mar.2021)

Island Poverty

There are many challenges facing our Island populations and as Argyll and Bute has 23 populated islands, this is a key issue for us. Officers from Argyll and Bute have been engaging with Scottish Government and with other Island Local Authorities to ensure

that food insecurity issues that affect island communities are known, understood and addressed.

Challenges for our remote and island communities include fuel poverty, cost / shortages of housing, transport challenges, difficulties in accessing employment and training opportunities, higher costs for food, online connectivity issues and access to services. In addition, young people face issues relating to loneliness and emotional wellbeing. A University of Edinburgh study has found that the number of young people in rural Scotland who say they are lonely is substantially higher than elderly people in the same communities. Over 3,000 people, aged 16-96, from across rural Scotland, including Argyll and Bute, took part in the RuralCovidLife survey. The study, which took place in October and November 2020, showed 32% of those aged 18 to 29 said they feel lonely most or all of the time, compared with 3% in the 70-79 age group, and 8% of the total surveyed.

Locally a range of activities are taking place to support and develop island places and communities. These include:

- The Council supports the Community Food Forum that was launched on 6th of February 2020 to be a network through which existing independent foodbanks, food waste and community food initiatives can share experience, advice and ideas. A huge amount of work was done during the pandemic by this forum helping to supply food across Argyll and Bute, including to island communities.
- ALIenergy gives a range of advice and practical help to those experiencing fuel poverty.
- Council subsidise scholar flights from Colonsay and Coll to Oban free of charge to enable students to access education and travel home at weekends.

In 2019 the Scottish Government published The National Islands Plan. The Islands Scotland Act 2018 - The Act sets out some of the key areas to achieve this by increasing population levels; improving and promoting sustainable economic development, environmental wellbeing, health and wellbeing, and community empowerment; improving transport services and digital connectivity; reducing fuel poverty; and enhancing biosecurity. The Islands Plan is laid out over 5 years and is underpinned by 4 key values: fairness, integration, environmental protection (green) and inclusiveness.

National Islands Plan: Annual Report 2020 - There are two key pilots currently ongoing in this area. Working with the Woodland Croft Partnership, exploring the expansion of the Woodland Croft Initiative to facilitate further access to land, crofting and forestry, and working with Rural Housing Scotland to develop a toolkit based on the experience of projects currently exploring small-scale mixed accommodation and business unit developments to support population, entrepreneurialism and home working. The pilots include communities in Orkney, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Argyll and Bute, and Highland. These pilots will help inform the development of the Repopulation Action Plan.

An example of local action is Ulva Island, which was bought by the North West Mull Community Woodland Company in 2018 for £4.4m, has doubled its population and is set for even more residents under expansion plans. There were only five people living on the island at the time of the purchase, but the population has since increased to 11, and six properties are to be refurbished in preparation for new residents. Funding for the project has come from the Scottish Government's Rural and Island Housing Fund, Argyll and Bute Council, Ecology Building Society as well as from NWMCWC's own funds.

On 15th March the Scottish Government published its first Population Strategy, see:

https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-future-opportunities-challenges-scotlands-changing-population/

Argyll and Bute's Economic Growth Manager sits on the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) Senior Officers' Group and its population sub-group, where a joint paper has been produced with the Scottish Government Population and Islands Teams

for the COHI meeting. The key areas of focus in that paper were Argyll & Bute, Western Isles and Caithness & Sutherland.

To create linkages between the national Strategy and to focus a more localised approach to population issues, it is suggested that there is merit in developing a concept and delivery framework around a specifically designated set of areas that may be entitled “Repopulation Zones.” This approach would also have the important psychological benefit of reframing the discussion away from the negative connotations of depopulation onto a more positive, development-orientated repopulation approach.

The overarching principle of these Zones would be to be place-based and provide a methodology to focus interventions on specific identified geographies. The work Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is undertaking on their Inclusive Growth Model could help inform this identification. This Model was highlighted in the October 2020 COHI paper and has two analytical components. One dealing with the area characteristics and profile and one dealing with the organisation’s investment and its impact. HIE is currently working with the James Hutton Institute and SRUC on the area profiling and area clusters.

Key Areas of the Plan:

A. Increasing Income from Employment and Earnings:

1. Employability:

Delivery of the **Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF)** has commenced within the broader context of the No One Left Behind policy direction Phase 1.
Eligible participants 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 <1.
- Parents who are aged <25 who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parent must have the right to live and work in the UK

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

user-based model of employability support for the parental groups identified in Every Child, Every Chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022, through:
Appropriate support focusing on intensive key worker support that provides:

- Person-centred help for parents to address their barriers to work, which might include a lack of skills or work experience, and / or signposting to health support, money advice or motivational support. The funding for this is made available under the 1973 Act and the 1999 Regulations.
- Help in meeting the increasing challenge of in-work poverty, targeting support to help parents already in work through the provision of training and employability support to remain active in the workplace and gain progression through a rewarding career. The funding for this is made available under the 1999 Regulations.
- Promote fair working practices, including payment of the Living Wage as this relates to the Grantee's areas of responsibility.

Delivering employability support to parents by:

- Identification, (re)engagement and support for parents who require support to access or progress in the labour market; and multi-agency partnership working within the partnership to ensure sufficient and suitable onward progression opportunities are available.
- Deliver intensive in and out of work employability support, including support to upskill, apply for jobs, etc. for low income parents who are not ready for Fair Start Scotland and other local or national programmes.
- Help in meeting the increasing challenge of in-work poverty, targeting in-work support to help parents already in work to upskill, providing access to training and support to progress in employment.
- Person-centred help for parents to address their barriers to work, which includes training, upskilling, as well as support to access health support, money advice, or motivational support through supporting individuals to access these wrap around support services.
- Delivering Employability Key Worker support services throughout a participant's journey. Key Workers will work with participants throughout the process and continue to provide support for up to 26 weeks following the participant's progression into work.
- Ensuring Employability Key Workers have the skills and local awareness to support the implementation of Action Plans, including full awareness of all support provided locally by partner organisations.
- Carrying out an initial assessment of all participants to ascertain specific barriers and needs; providing an Action Plan to participants identified as requiring this intervention.

- Providing aftercare support for up to 52 weeks that enables participants entering employment to sustain and further improve their skills.
- Delivering an employability system that supports more parents, particularly those facing multiple barriers - to move into the right job at the right time.
- Putting in place arrangements that maximise the opportunity for inclusion and investment of partner funds.
- Enhancing links between ELC expansion and local employability services to support new training and employment opportunities- and upskilling and progression of existing staff - enabled by the funded 1,140 ELC provision. To opportunities specifically available within the expanding ELC sector.

  Further support available under the No One Left Behind policy direction is the **Argyll and Bute Employer Recruitment and Training Incentive (ABERTI)**. This incentive is aimed at job ready participants aged 16 to 67 years. Employers are able to recruit a maximum of two employees per annum and must be able to evidence employment is in addition to their existing workforce and will lead to a sustainable job. The funding, a maximum £3,500 per employee, may be used by the employer at their discretion to help towards the costs associated with employing the additional member of staff. However, a minimum of £500 must be spent on direct training provision (which may include in-work training) and must be evidenced on the employee's Learning Action Plan and copies of relevant certificate/s provided.

Fair Start Scotland (FSS) is currently being delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team on behalf of People Plus.
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 to find and remain in employment or self-employment.

Dedicated Key Workers provide:

- One-to-one meetings, focusing on and offering a holistic approach to meet individual needs and issues.
- Life coaching, a counselling type approach with guidance and advice.
- Creation of an in-depth action plan to provide pre work support for 12-18 months.
- Participants with the job searching skills required to actively job search, reviewing job applications and CVs.
- Conduct mock interview and interview technique sessions.
- Ensure awareness of other services within the community and signposting as appropriate; Debt Management, Addiction Services, Literacy and Numeracy, Housing Services, Welfare Rights, Citizens Advice, etc.

- Encourage participants to engage in an array of E Learning courses provided by PeoplePlus.
- Provide the opportunity to move into some form of work experience which meets the participant's skills sets and aspirations.
- Offer high quality in-work support for 12 months following the transition to employment.

Business Support

The Rural Skills Accelerator Programme within the Rural Growth Deal:

- Rural Growth Deal (RGD), revised Rural Skills Accelerator Programme (Economic Growth Manager) submitted to the Scottish Government on Thursday, 19th November 2020. Skills is integral to all RGD proposals, but the key components of the Rural Skills Accelerator Programme are:
- Network of circa five STEM Hubs across Argyll and Bute – online and face-to-face learning experiences (including mobile delivery) for all ages and capabilities. Phased delivery approach starting in Dunoon.
- Support the development of the built environment of Argyll College UHI in Dunoon.
- Pan-Argyll and Bute business (SMEs and social enterprises) focused skills, education and training support.

In December 2020, through a competitive bid, the council secured £490k (plus £50k of match funding; £540k budget in total) from the Clyde Mission Fund to support the re-purposing of the council's Hill Street office in Dunoon to create a STEM/Community Hub. This opportunity will act as a pilot in terms of the establishment of similar hubs across Argyll and Bute aligned to the RGD Rural Skills Accelerator Programme.

Economic & Social Recovery

- Economic data over the period continues to show a challenging economic outlook. Although there has been a slight decrease, February to March, in the number of people claiming unemployment benefits (down by 20) across Argyll and Bute, the number of claimants at 5.7% of the working age population, is higher than that pre-pandemic and slightly lower than the overall Scotland figure of 6.1%.

- Ongoing participation on Highlands and Islands Skills Leadership Forum with regard to the implementation of the revised Highlands and Islands Skills Investment Plan (Economic Growth Manager) and through the LOIP Outcome 3 Group consideration is being given to the preparation of an Argyll and Bute Skills Strategy.

- Economic Growth (including Business Gateway) is now finalising the dissemination of the Strategic Framework Business Fund (SFBF), which closed to applications on 22nd March 2021. The council's Economic Growth Team received 3,079 SFBF applications in total. As of 9th April, 2,347 were approved for payment, of which 551 were for Islands Equivalent Payments (IEP). Nearly £13.1m grants were awarded plus nearly £3.1m under IEP. Restart grants were paid to SFBF recipients on 19th April 2021 along with a final SFBF payment; circa £23m total for this final payment run.

Future Planned Activity

Based on the No One Left Behind policy direction, focus has been given to strengthening Local Employability Partnerships to take forward the No One Left Behind Phase 2 Delivery Plan, the preparation of a Local Delivery and Improvement Plan, and the COVID-19 response based on the principles which underpin the approach contained within the partnership agreement with the Scottish Government.

- Submit a bid(s) to the UK Community Renewal Fund through the council's open and transparent competitive bid process at the local level.

- Argyll and Bute Council is a Gateway Organisation for the UK Government's Kickstart Scheme for 25 employers and 50 placements further to approval from the DWP on 18th February 2021. It is hoped that the Young Person's Guarantee will be used to augment the support provided through the UK Government's Kickstart Scheme by a further six months.

- Under the Scottish Government's Programme for Government Young Person's Guarantee (16-24-year olds), Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team has accepted an offer of grant to deliver this scheme across the area. The Interventions for Argyll and Bute (2020/21 and 2021/22) are as follows:

    - a waged opportunity with employers (to cover all employment costs for a young person on a 26-week work placement, with 25 hours per week);

    - formal volunteering; and Modern Apprenticeships delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's 'Growing Our Own' Team;

    - Ongoing delivery of all current employability contracts (e.g. Fair Start Scotland) and the No One Left Behind Policy Interventions;

- Focus on Economic and Social recovery going forward through the Argyll Economic Resilience Forum (chaired by HIE) and the supporting Officer Advisory Group (key partners and agencies).

- Under the Scottish Government's Programme for Government Young Person's Guarantee (16-24-year olds), Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team has accepted an offer of grant to deliver this scheme across the area. The Interventions for Argyll and Bute (2020/21 and 2021/22) are as follows:

    - a waged opportunity with employers (to cover all employment costs for a young person on a 26-week work placement, with 25 hours per week);

    - formal volunteering; and Modern Apprenticeships delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's 'Growing Our Own' Team.

- Argyll and Bute Council will shortly be advertising for a Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) Engagement Worker, as single point of contact for employers and individuals across Argyll and Bute.

- Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team has a number of sources of support available to help people into work - whether for young people looking to go into a job or further education, employers looking to set up job placements, or supporting the long-term unemployed to access skills, training and jobs. See: **https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-work**and **https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/forms/contact-employability-team**

2. Skills Development Scotland:

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 the our partners within the school to identify young people 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. For more information please click on the following link. What We Do - Scotland's Career Service

Due to COVID and the challenges and uncertainty that it has brought we have continued to work closely with senior leaders and pupil support within schools to ensure that any young person that needed our support was identified. Since 20 March 2020, when schools closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our careers advisers were able to quickly move form a face-to-face service delivery to a virtual offer. This has continued as lockdowns were eased and then re-established, we continue to offer a blended approach (face to face & virtual).

The COVID- 19 pandemic has brought challenges but also opportunities for new ways to support our customers in Argyll and Bute. We were able to offer a range online webinar to school pupils and all school leavers explaining the support that was available. In partnership with our colleagues in our schools we organised a very successful Higher Education Fayre for pupils who were considering apply to university. As part of our "I can do anything session" we continued to encourage our young people in S2/S3 to think about career opportunities that are available to them and the skills required. This was via a virtual platform which ensures that all young people had the opportunity to be involved. We focused our support for parents and carers and ran parental engagement webinars around subject choice and opportunities after school. We have received excellent feedback from our young people, parents, and partners around all these events.

School Leaver Cohort 19/20 - There were 702 young people who left school during the 19/20 school cohort and our team worked hard over the summer months to follow up those who had left to ensure support was offered.

Post School Service Next Steps - Service to support 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: Activity Agreements, Employability Fund and other training programmes, education and employment.
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our service supporting young people to develop their career management skills and progress through the employability pipeline continued via our virtual delivery methods. Following closure of our centres on 19 March 2020 our advisers have supported via on-line and telephone delivery and continued to provide targeted and universal support for adult customers, including Next Steps support. In line with the Scottish Government road map we are hoping to open our centres for face to face service delivery from 17th May onwards.
Post school service; adults & PACE - Working in partnership with a range of partners to support local job clubs helping unemployed adults to develop their career management and employability skills and move into employment. In Argyll & Bute our post school advisers have worked closely with the employability partnership to deliver support via DWP's Youth Hub format.

Together with our colleagues in UHI Argyll College our team also supported Virtual Open days which also offered virtual career coaching appointments to anyone within the college setting

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.

Despite restrictions on face to face contact because of COVID-19, PACE support continues to be delivered through the PACE Helpline, through webinars and enhanced online resources.

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 during the Pandemic 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.

Care Experienced: Work in partnership with Throughcare/After Care workers to support young people who are care experienced. Active members of Throughcare/After Care local and central forums. 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.

3. Council Apprenticeships:

As a result of Covid-19, no further apprenticeships were offered in 2020, however in 2021, 4 vacancies have been successfully recruited to with a further 5 in the process of recruitment to date. This will bring our total apprenticeships offered since 2014, up to 70 once recruitment has concluded. During 2020, a further 6 apprentices who started in previous years, completed their apprenticeship. All of them went onto secure a positive destination, with 4 of them going onto secure employment with Argyll and Bute Council. We have a high rate of apprentices going onto secure employment with Argyll and Bute Council on completion with 76% off all apprentices completed securing a job

with the council, this has increased since the last plan. By linking all our vacancies to workforce planning we are hopeful that this trend can continue. 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. Despite delivering this during a pandemic, the pupils have still been able to access a work placement which will be of real benefit to them in the future.

Argyll and Bute Council works 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. Linked to workforce planning it is hoped that we will be able to continue to offer opportunities for young people within Argyll and Bute.

4. Education Recovery/ Supporting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds /Remote learning and teaching:

Between March and June 2020, Argyll and Bute Education Recovery Work stream 2 comprised 14 members from across education sectors, roles and areas of expertise. It addressed 10 areas identified by different Scottish Government's COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) Work streams: SG Work stream 1 – Term 4 Learning; Work stream 3 – Curriculum and Assessment; Work stream 4 – Supporting Learners from Disadvantaged Backgrounds; Work stream 5 – Pastoral Care for Children and Young People.

Following the closure of schools on 23rd March 2020, across the authority, teachers were effective in engaging with pupils at home and in the area hubs which were set up for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Teachers provided and assessed online learning via a number of online platforms, such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and SeeSaw. Many pupils were identified who had no or insufficient digital devices at home to allow engagement with online learning. Schools were responsive by lending out hundreds of devices to pupils and their families and ensuring that learning materials were available in the formats that individual families required, including paper-based formats when necessary. Feedback to schools from parents and carers on provision during this period of school closure was positive.

The key aim of Work Stream 2 was to build on such successes and support the building of further capability and expertise in online provision in advance of the expected Blended Learning model which was being suggested for August 2020 by the Scottish Government. The work stream made a series of recommendations relating to the following key areas:

- Ensuring the learning and teaching provision to all learners during the period of school closure and any future periods of Blended Learning was of the highest possible quality;
- Ensuring coherence and progression between learning at home and face-to-face learning in schools during anticipated periods of Blended Learning;
- Tracking and monitoring the health and wellbeing of pupils during school closure or Blended Learning, and associated appropriate interventions to address issues;
- Supporting learning in the home or Hubs for pupils with Additional Support Needs;
- Ensuring effective support for and communication with parents and carers during periods of home learning;
- Maximizing the usefulness of GLOW, the online portal which staff and pupils use to provide and access online learning;
- Updating Curriculum for Excellence Guidance to reflect the context of home learning;
- Reporting on pupils' progress in Broad General Education and Senior Phase during school closure;
- Supporting disadvantaged learners through term 4 and into the new school session;
- Addressing the long-term impact of school closure on learner progress and attainment, with focus on disadvantaged children and young people;
- Delivering Equity in provision during term 4 and into the 2020-21 session, including the key focus on digital equity, through provision of digital devices and connectivity solutions to all pupils who required them to engage effectively with online learning at home;
- Developing the skills and confidence of teaching staff in the provision of high quality and engaging online learning experiences.

In early August 2020 the Scottish Government announced the full-time return of all pupils to school on 17th August, thus negating the need for blended or home learning for almost all pupils at that time. However, the work of Work stream 2 continued between August and December 2020 as described below, and the above recommendations were implemented during the period of school closure between January and March 2021.

Wellbeing of pupils, families and staff.

Mar 2020– June 2020	The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) continued to provide almost all services, with an increase in remote access to children and families. In addition, the EPS provided a parent / carer support line during the period of the initial lockdown to provide help and advice on supporting children during these difficult circumstances. The EPS provided online interactive sessions on wellbeing for children, families and staff when children and young people returned to schools, which was well attended and received. Trauma training at informed and skilled levels were made available for all education staff through e-learning modules.
Aug 2020 – Dec 2020	The EPS provided further online interactive sessions on wellbeing as children and young people returned to schools. Successful interviews took place for school counsellors to provide a service for primary children from age ten upwards. The Team Leader took up post in November 2020. A skilled and experienced principal teacher (PT) for Nurture was appointed to support the nurture developments in schools in line with the recommendations of the Nurture Strategy Group and the recovery work stream with representation from primary Head Teachers. Primary schools signed up for the initial phase of nurture developments to ensure effective early intervention to support primary age children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who may have experienced trauma. There was significant engagement with the trauma e-learning modules by staff across primary schools with an increase in discussion of how we can respond to trauma evident through head teacher and other meetings. Named persons engaged with facilitated online trauma skilled training to support changes to practice to improve outcomes for all.

Jan 2021 – Mar 2021	Remote access to the educational psychology service continued with strong engagement across primary schools. 7.5 fte school counsellors took up post and began a robust programme of training and induction regarding Argyll and Bute procedures. Information on the counselling service was circulated to schools and referrals began to be received. Robust evaluation of the service began from the outset with support from the EPS and research assistant. The PT Nurture was released from his substantive post and began engagement with schools to support the embedding of effective nurture practices, building in evaluation of impact from the outset.

5. Early Years.

March 2020-June 2020

During this first period of lockdown in each locality an Early Years childcare hub was opened to provide care for Keyworker and vulnerable children under school age. A number of our very valuable partnership childminders also opened to provide care for our youngest children. The Early Learning and Childcare Work Stream (5), working from Scottish Government Guidance provided advice and support to open settings to ensure they operated safely whilst still providing quality care. Also, during this time the central Early Years Team completed the admissions process to allocate every eligible child a place of their choice in a setting or with a childminder. This process was made more challenging by restrictions on children not being able to attend two different settings, unless in exceptional circumstances. In addition, to all children successfully being allocated a place, we were one of only a few Local Authorities able to offer every eligible child 1140 hours despite the delayed implementation date. Something we are extremely proud of.

6. Clyde Mission Fund and Rural Growth Deal.

Argyll and Bute Council has been awarded £490,000 of funding from the Clyde Mission Fund, which aims to repurpose buildings close to the Clyde; the Council has identified a building a Dunoon to be repurposed to consist of both a STEM hub and a community hub. The STEM hub is being designed, and will be run, by the Digital Learning Team. The concept of the STEM hub is to establish both a venue in Dunoon which learners can attend, and also offer a mobile element where a van with STEM equipment is used to deliver learning to learners across Argyll and Bute.

The Clyde Mission Fund also ties in to the Rural Growth Deal, through which it is hoped that five hubs will be established throughout Argyll and Bute, each with a theme that leveraged its location (for example, a focus on defense and engineering in a Helensburgh hub, and on marine sciences and aviation in an Oban hub). If the Council can secure more funding from the deal, it would help with establishing another hub in

addition to the one in Dunoon; a business case has been produced for this, and the Council is awaiting a response to determine what the available funding might look like.

7. Argyll College and University of the Highlands and Islands:

As a college our aim is to provide high quality, innovative educational opportunities to local, and often remote populations. Knowing that better education can lead to greater opportunities to increase income, we work constantly to refresh and examine our curriculum to see how we can embed employability skills to match local employment needs. We work closely with local employers to provide educational routes that provide workforce-ready skills, thereby supporting the Argyll economy and enhancing the quality of life for the communities we serve.

Work experience and work placements are an important component of our courses and where possible, are built in to enhance students' work-related skills and employability. Enterprise activities simulate workplace initiatives. The college delivers a variety of SVQs, and Modern Apprenticeships to further promote work-based learning, and we have strong links with Argyll's schools; through our Schools Link programme, we offer a range of vocational qualifications from S3 upwards. Foundation Apprenticeships are additionally available for S5 and S6 pupils, further enhancing work-based skills. The college is working alongside the council and with the Rural Growth Deal with a particular interest in marine and aquaculture.

Argyll College is fully committed to the Scottish government's period poverty scheme so that menstruating students can have free access to period products so that they need not be disadvantaged if they cannot afford to purchase their own.

Because we are aware that there is very often a link between poverty and domestic violence we have invested resources to train front line staff in how to respond to reports of gender based violence the better to support students and their children who may be living this experience.

The College and UHI recognise that not all students will be able to meet the conventional course entry requirements. We are therefore able to consider a potential student's life and work experience based on contextualised interviews to determine the most relevant course route and level for each applicant. The Admissions Department continue to develop processes which enable students to access interviews online.

Argyll College and UHI continue to provide a wide range of support services and have developed ways to deliver this support remotely during the COVID-19 situation. As teaching moved to being fully online and using a variety of technologies, students who did not have suitable IT equipment were able to have college laptops on loan. This year the college accessed funding from the Scottish Government's Digital Poverty Fund, allowing us to provide eligible students with the use of a laptop for the duration of their course. This was particularly helpful for those of our students who needed access to a second device so that they could continue with their own studies while home schooling children.

Where students could not afford internet, bursary systems have been used to help support students to buy dongles or to source some internet. Support Assistants have continued to provide one to one learning support via phone and WebEx technologies. The College has a Student Counsellor and Wellbeing Officer who has trained in online counselling, and college staff remain in frequent contact with students, referring them to the college counsellor for mental health support if necessary.

Over the winter months, over 25 households within our student body were helped financially from various Winter Covid Funds.

Student Services continue to support our students with their applications for Bursary, EMA, Care Experienced or Enhanced Care Experienced Bursaries for full time students. We support students to access as much funding as they are able to from SAAS and the Student Loan Company.

The College and UHI recognise the barriers that Care Experienced young people can have to further and higher education. All Care Experienced students can receive support to apply for enhanced bursary, general wellbeing support and additional learning support if required.

B. Increasing Income through Benefits:

1. Flexible Food Fund:

Launched on 11 January the Argyll and Bute Flexible Food Fund (FFF) uses funds provided by the Scottish Government to support people with financial insecurities to pay for food and fuel during these tough times. The fund provides a payment made to householders if they prove that they do not have the minimum income in their bank accounts to cover the costs of food and/or fuel for a month. Householders or claimants are then incentivised to engage with the advice agencies, Bute Advice Centre and ALIenergy, by securing a second monthly payment if there is evidence that they have taken advantage of these professional services to help them learn how to manage their financial situation in the medium to long term. Failure to engage with the service means that no further grant funded support is made to the claimant.

Householders or claimants are encouraged to make claims to the Flexible Food Fund online using an electronic form on the Council website however an alternative gateway is available through the Argyll and Bute Community Food Forum which involves all of the foodbanks in the area. Scottish Welfare Fund Team are administering. This means that people regularly presenting at foodbanks for food packages are also getting referred to the FFF project where their need for immediate support is assessed as is their overall circumstances. They are given the support they need to enable them to live on the resources that they are entitled to receive. Over 95% of householders or claims submitting a claim are engaging with the advice services.

Advice services provide the following support:

- Money advice, money management and budgeting skills;
- Income or benefit maximisation;
- Debt advice;
- Fuel poverty advice including:
    - Access to fuel vouchers;
    - Debt relief;
    - Warm home discounts;
    - Home heating, efficiency measures, switching, support with appliances and the home heat fund.

At the end of April 2021, after just under 4 months there had been 523 applications for support with 273 awards being made. However even households that are not given short term grant funding through the project are still given the opportunity of support from the advice services and a total of 388 cases have been opened by Bute Advice centre and ALIenergy.

The total client gain at 30 April is £504,000 meaning that the average client gain per household is £1,300 based on the 388 open cases. In addition, the team are managing a debt portfolio of £51,000 across all claimants negotiating with creditors to reduce the arrears.

The case studies below show the impact that this project is having in supporting people in Argyll and Bute.

Case Study 1 Family

This is a single parent who was finding providing for her children really challenging particularly over the lockdown. Unable to access her cheaper shops on the mainland and with limited choice locally, her food bill had increased to a level where she was panicking. The Adviser Heather was able to support the client to access the FFF and she received two pots short term grant funding of £320 per month from the Council's FFF team. The claimant was very concerned about the state of her threadbare carpets, particularly on the stairs as the children had caught their toes in the threads and almost fallen down the stairs a number of times. A Community Care Grant was applied for and £1300 was awarded allowing the claimant to get new carpets for her house and some other goods. When she knew of her award the client contacted Heather in tears, saying that for the first time in a long time she was going to fill her store cupboards full and she would no longer feel ashamed of her home. She was so grateful that the FFF project existed and had helped her family. The client suffers from anxiety and depression, she told her adviser how much better she felt, the impact on her wellbeing had been so positive.

Case Study 2

Ms H came to us via FFF and was paying £100 a month but was not submitting meter readings or checking her account. She knew the £100 a month wouldn't be enough to pay for her debt and ongoing usage but couldn't afford to increase this and had been ignoring this along with other debts. With ALIenergy's support, Ms H set up her online energy account and submitted meter readings online. This produced an accurate bill of £1,038.34. Ms H did not have the funds to pay any more than the £100 so paying this debt was not possible. The debt also prevented Ms H from switching to a cheaper tariff. ALIenergy applied to the Home Heating Support Fund for help with energy debt relief. The application was successful, and Ms H was awarded £1,300. This cleared her debt and helped with ongoing costs. Ms H is now confident she can submit regular meter readings to ensure her bills are accurate and continue with her £100 monthly payment comfortably while we continue to work with her to check her tariff options.

Case Study 3:

Ms M came to us via FFF having just moved into a new tenancy after fleeing domestic abuse. Ms M was worried about affording her heating on her low income while also suffering health issues. ALIenergy made a successful application to the Home Heating Support Fund and Ms M's energy account was credited with £700. Ms M told us due to her health issues she had to wash her clothes and bedding daily and without a tumble dryer this was a concern. ALIenergy recognised the impact on damp and condensation from trying to dry this amount of clothing and bedding so made an application for a tumble dryer. Ms M was awarded £300 to purchase a tumble dryer and bedding.

The FFF project has been hugely successful to date bringing together the teams from the council, the third sector and the community to support people with significant food and fuel insecurity. The original project was due to run to June 2021 however with more funding from the government an extension to the project has been agreed to 31 March 2022. This extension will allow the project to scale up more and support more households as it has been clear that there remains significant demand in Argyll and Bute for this type of support.

2. **Universal Pathway Quality Improvement Collaborative Financial Inclusion Practicum** (UPQIC):

Background

In October 2019, teams, consisting of money advisors and Health Visitors from across Scotland came together to work with Improvement Advisors from the 'Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative'. The aim was to implement or improve the processes already in place in relation to financial inclusion discussions between Health Visitors and families as part of the Universal Health Visiting Pathway, referring them for financial advice where required.

The project originally commenced in October 2019 and was due to finish in 2020 however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the project was put on hold until January 2021, when work was able to re start.

The team from Argyll and Bute consists of 2 Health Visitors from Bute and Cowal, and Bute Advice Service. They have developed a referral pathway between the services, where Health Visitors refer families directly to Bute Advice for further advice and support.

Project Aim:

'*By September 2021, Health Visitors in Argyll and Bute (Bute & Cowal), will have a financial discussion with parents at 80% of contacts on the Health Visiting Pathway, and where a need is identified 100% will receive the requested money advice and benefit support'*

Progress to date from January – May 2021

In conjunction with Bute Advice Centre the Health Visitors in Bute developed a financial referral pathway which allows them to directly refer families with 'money worries' into the local money advice service (Bute Advice). This has provided a single point of contact for families to a money advice service. Between January and April 2021, Bute Advice have received 13 referrals as a result of Health Visitors having 'money worries' conversation with families. Families have also shown good engagement with Bute Advice, with 11 out of the 13 families referred engaging with the process.

A service feedback questionnaire is starting to capture the impact of the referral outcome for families. In feedback from families they reported 100% satisfaction with the service received, easiness of the referral process, and confidence in accessing Bute Advice service again. They highlighted the experience as being quick, professional, efficient, and being given financial help that they weren't aware of. Benefits to these families, included, *'help with gas, electricity, rent,', 'freed up more money', 'very much got myself and my family back on our feet'.* Client financial gain has been significant having been supported through access to The Flexible Food fund and ALIenergy.

As part of the quality improvement approach, PDSA cycles continue and data is being captured to ensure the referral pathway and feedback process is robust. The project in conjunction with The Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative runs until September 2021, when it is hoped that a Financial Referral Pathway and the learning from this project can be implemented in other areas in Argyll and Bute.

3. Client Gain through Advice Activity:

The table below shows the client gain from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the citizens of Argyll and Bute as £9,129,380.

Organisation	2020/2021 (£)
Bute Advice Centre	621,441
Argyll and Bute Council Welfare Rights	3,364,133
ACHA Welfare Rights	4,177,180
Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau	557,688
ALIenergy	408,938
TOTAL	**9,129,380**

C. Cost of Living:

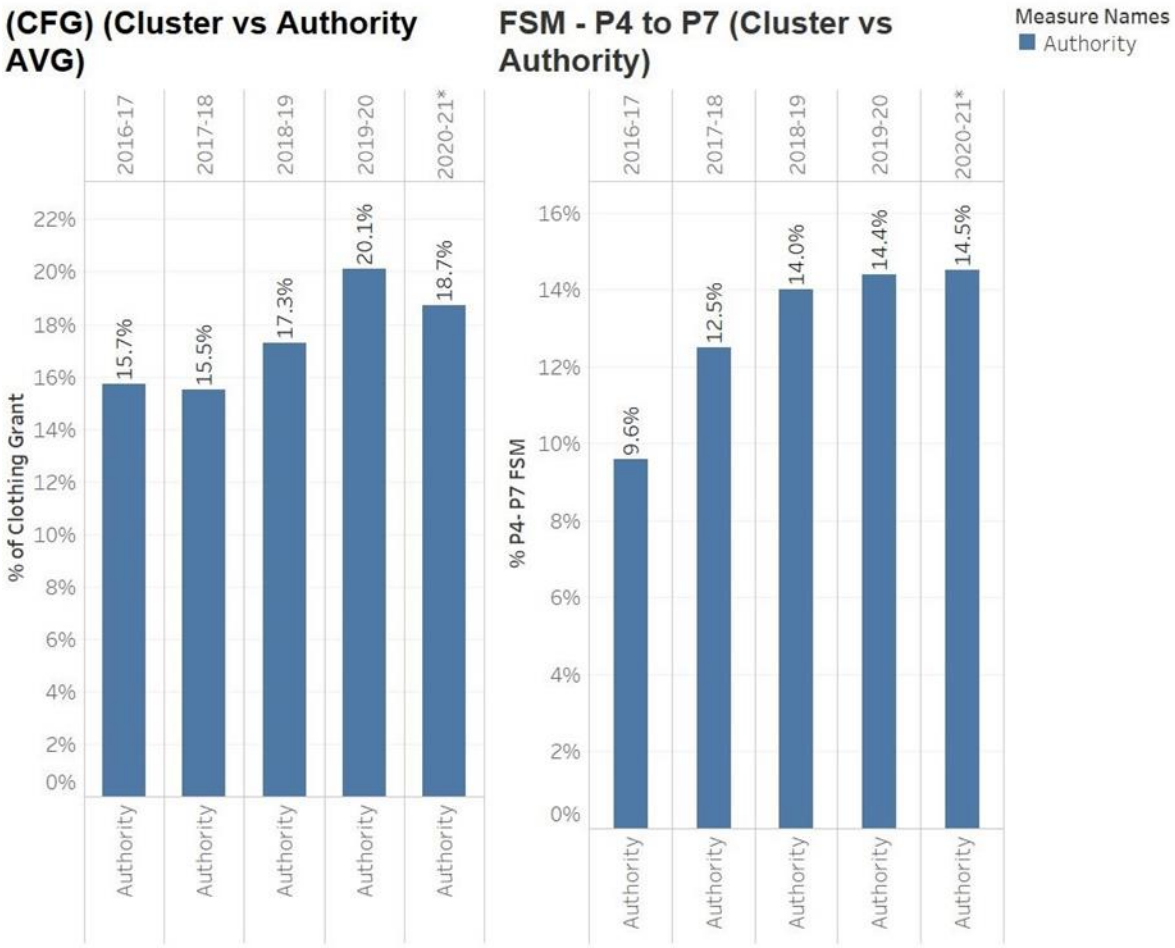
1. Free School Meals and Holiday Hunger:

Since the last Action Plan Update, free school meals support for entitled pupils has remained in place:

- For children and young people who have been learning at home, parents have received a cash payment of £15 per week, paid fortnightly, as a replacement for their free school meal.

- For children and young people attending Hub schools since January 2021, hot meals have been available on site, and for children entitled to free meals that has been in addition to their cash payments.
- Cash payments have continued throughout the Easter holiday and will also continue throughout all future holiday periods, funded by Scottish Government.
- Work is underway to implement free school meals for all pupils in receipt of 1140 hours of childcare in early years' settings.
- Work is also underway to implement the extension of universal free school meals to all Primary school pupils by August 2022, beginning with extended provision for pupils in P4 from August 2021.
- Pupil feedback continues to be the basis for the development of school lunch menus, subject to them meeting the revised Food and Drink in Schools standards which came into effect in April 2021.
- Free school meal uptake remains higher than the Scottish average, at around 82% in P1 – P3.

Update of Free School Meals in 2019-21 was 1,030, for the same period in 2020-21 it was 1,286, an increase of approximately 20%. This increase is directly linked to the pandemic.



2. School Clothing Banks:

Consultation with Schools has taken place on the need for School Clothing Banks. Feedback from 34 Schools has been received. 65% of schools are operating some sort of clothing bank but the idea for Community led clothing banks is popular with 91% of respondents in general. It is planned to fully evaluate the responses by the end of June and talk to schools and community groups seeking volunteers to prepare the clothing banks going forward. The objective is to have a school clothing bank run in the community in each of our 6 main towns by the end of March 2022.

3. Housing:

During the Covid-19 Lockdown, it was necessary to source temporary accommodation across Argyll and Bute. As a result, a small number of families with children were housed in the short term in unsuitable accommodation. These cases are all now

resolved, and all families with children who are residing in temporary accommodation are in self-contained accommodation.

Housing Services is currently working with key partners to provide a set of detailed Specialist Provision templates which will provide appropriate evidence of the scale and type of Specialist Provision in the local area; demonstrate a clear understanding of the current scale and type of unmet need, and provision required in future for new build properties. This will ensure that children's needs are met moving forward. In addition, the Housing Service has employed a full time Occupational Therapist to work within the housing service to ensure needs are met both within new build RSL properties and adaptation referrals for Private Sector Housing Grant.

Argyll and Bute Council is working with our RSL partner ACHA to carry out improvements to Duncholgan and Bayview Gypsy/Travellers Sites. Consultation is being undertaken with residents to determine the scope of works and funds have been made available by the Scottish Government to carry out these improvement works.

4. Fuel Poverty:

Argyll, Lomond and the Islands Energy Agency (ALIenergy) continues to provide energy efficiency and affordable warmth advice to households in Fuel Poverty across Argyll and Bute. We accessed £2,520 for families we were working with from Home Start's Winter Fund earlier this year. This fund awarded cash payments to parents to help with purchasing new beds, prams, clothing, shoes, white goods and heating bills.

ALIenergy registered with the Fuel Bank Foundation in February 2021. Reporting on 5th May, we had accessed 216 fuel vouchers for pre-payment customers with a total value of £11,368.
Fuel Vouchers are worth £49 November to April and £30 May to October. These vouchers have been a lifeline to prepayment customers unable to heat, light and cook in their homes when finances have been tight.

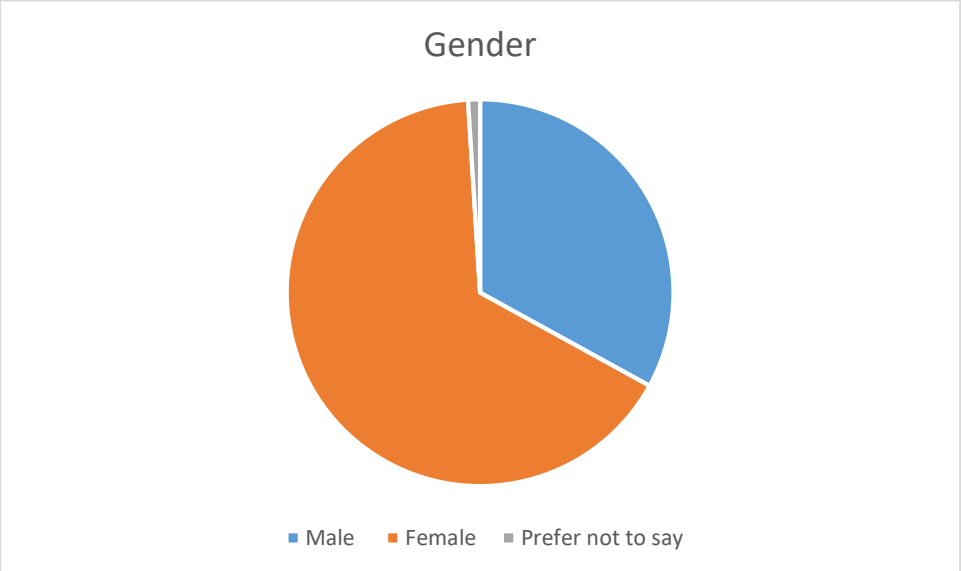
Fuel Voucher Report as of 05/05/2021			**People Helped**		
	Redeemed	**Total Issued**	**Adults**	**Children**	**Total**
21/22	60	60	55	31	86
20/21	172	173	200	123	323
Total	60	60	55	31	86

The Fuel Bank Foundation are piloting the Heat Fund which offers free bulk heating fuel deliveries including coal, oil and wood. As a large area of Argyll and Bute is off the gas grid, this fund has been invaluable for householders reliant on more expensive heating fuels, the majority of which is in social housing and no options to change to a cheaper or renewable heating system. Successful applications have been awarded 5 bags of coal with a value of £95 or 1,000 litres of oil with a value of £400.

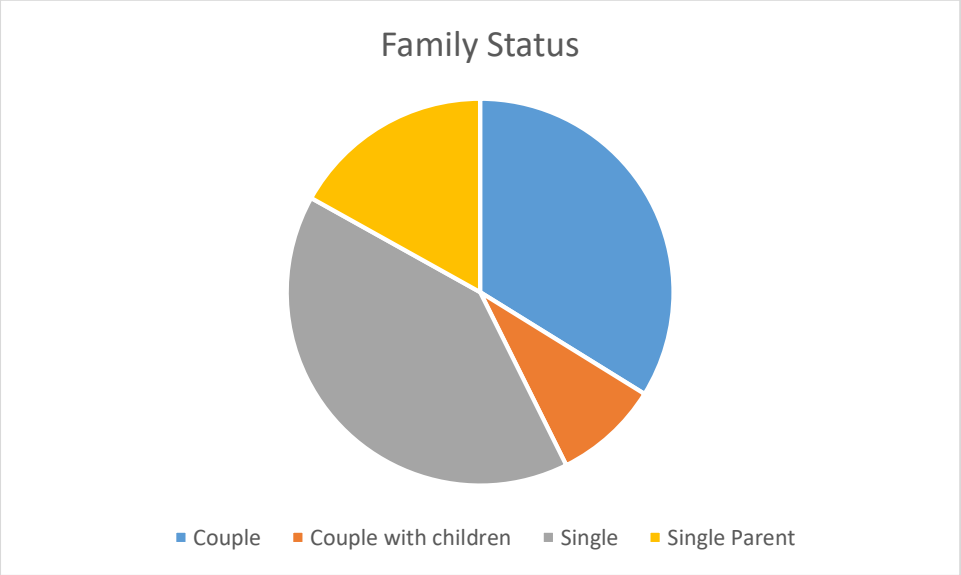
The Scottish Government allocated £4M to the Home Heating Support Fund in response to COVID-19. This fund helped with energy debt and customers who were self-rationing. In the 5 weeks of the Home Heating Support Fund being available, our Affordable Warmth team made 106 applications with a total award of £60,010.80. This money was paid directly to suppliers to cover energy debt, ongoing costs and pre-payment vouchers.

ALIenergy migrated to new case recording system in 2020. In 2020-21 we opened 649 new cases, delivered 2322 energy advice sessions, made 600 referrals including referrals to Home Energy Scotland, foodbanks and the Fuel Bank Foundation, and recorded 1136 other case activities including tariff checks, liaising with suppliers, checking eligibility, etc.

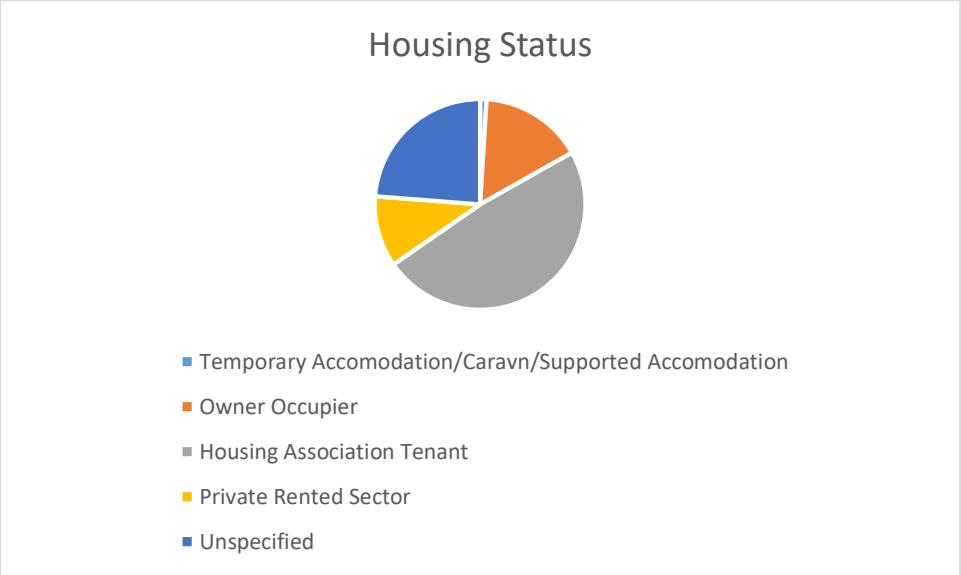
The following client demographics were reported against cases in 2020-21.



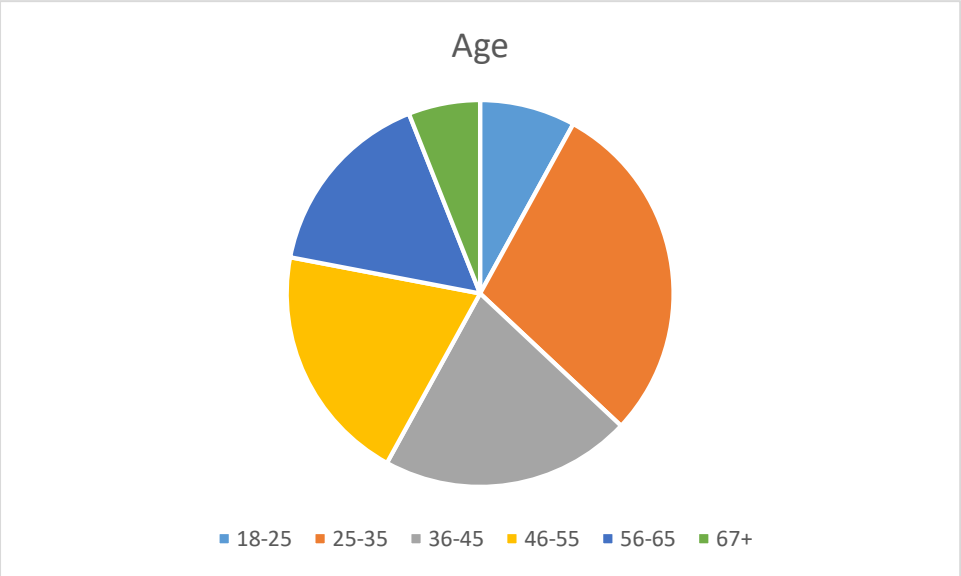
The gender split above shows a majority of clients were female, this can be attributed to the large number of single mothers accessing our service.



Where family status was recorded, 12% were couples with children and 23% were single parent families, showing over a third of our clients had children in the home.



Where housing status was recorded, 49% of clients were found to be in social housing.



The perceived image of fuel poverty is usually an elderly person sitting with a blanket by the fire but where age was recorded, it shows a large proportion of our client base was much younger and most likely families with children.

ALIenergy have been working with the Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum to deliver Argyll & Bute Council's Flexible Food Fund in partnership with the Council and Bute Advice Centre. The fund was launched in January 2020 and in the first four months of the project we have worked with 173 Flexible Food Fund applicants with an estimated client gain of £111,451.50.

ALIenergy's Affordable Warmth team made 42 applications on behalf of Flexible Food Fund clients with a total award of £26,423.66. This was £16,450.29 energy debt relief and £9,973.37 towards ongoing energy costs.

Our relationship with the Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum from the FFF project allowed us to distribute 160 Cosy Kits to 11 independent foodbanks across Argyll and Bute. These kits consisted of a hot water bottle, blanket, thermal socks, night light torch, cold alarm and advice leaflets. We hope this small gesture provided some warmth and comfort to people who are struggling to stay warm at home. We received excellent feedback from Foodbanks and their service users, with some suggesting the hot water and blankets were useful when meeting people outside under COVID-19 regulations. Local sewing bee and crafting groups have also got involved making hot water bottle covers to help us maximise funds available for other items within the kit.

5. Home Start Winter Fund:

The Home Start Winter Fund distributed £4000 among fifteen local families who required additional support in keeping warm during the winter months. The fund went to purchasing items for families & children that included:

- new thicker duvet covers and bedding,
- winter coats and boots,
- assisting with fuel heating costs,
- helping to maintain warm home environments by reducing drafts and maintaining healthy moisture levels within the home environment, reducing damp.

Feedback was very positive, including a letter from a child saying thank you for a new duvet cover they received.

6. Food Forum:

On the 6th of February 2020 the Argyll and Bute Community Food Forum was launched. Bute Advice Service provides the coordination role, bringing the forum together as a collective of independent organisations. The Council supports the initiative which is a network through which existing independent foodbanks, food waste and community food initiatives can share experience, advice and ideas.

It is also to be a forum for those who are considering setting up a foodbank or community food initiative including food waste projects or those who wish to volunteer. Today they have a wide membership covering the whole of Argyll and Bute including several islands.

Examples of some of achievements of Food Forum members during the Covid-19 crisis include:

Foodbank	**Days Allocations of Food from April 20-Mar21**	**No of families supported**	**Primary problems facing families with children**	**Has the lunch support from A & B Council over the holidays had an impact on families**	**Main issues facing the foodbank in the last year**
Tarbert Pantry	60000 + daily allocations	190 individuals of which 95 are families	Low income, benefits, unemployed single parents, fuel poverty, lack of access to supermarkets	Lunch support has helped a little.	Issues with delivery van

Hub Grub Hub (Dunoon)	17500 daily allocations	210	Fuel and rent	Yes	Food supplies, inability to buy in bulk and numbers of new families
Hope Kitchen (Oban)	20944 daily allocations	2992 individuals 664 families	Low income, benefits, unemployed, single parents, fuel poverty, children not able to attend school. Self-employed.	Yes, we saw a reduction in demand when people were provided with cash into their bank accounts. We supported some to apply for Free School Meals.	People becoming very dependent on the food bank / other services not accessible / had to close our café / referrers not referring in same way as previously / more families and less single people / delivery service needed for those who could not collect. Some people have been reticent to access the food bank due to the stigma associated with Hope Kitchen.
MOMA Mid-Argyll	1092 daily allocations	63	Not Recorded	Not Recorded	No issues to report.
Tiree Trust	25 families; although others may use our confidential community cupboard food phone box.	25	Continued furlough (on minimum contracted hours), reduced employment, low paid.	Unaware of any recipients.	The main issues our food group has faced over the past year is reducing the stigma of asking for assistance in such a small close-knit community visitors to the island.
Islay Foodbank	200 daily allocations	10-15	Not Recorded	Not Recorded	Lack of uptake therefore a rebranding and a new website has helped this and ability to request support by text.
Bute Oasis (Bute)	Thousands (Final collating of stats still to be done)	Hundreds, at its peak 400 families were being supported weekly, this reduced	Lack of income	Not much of an apparent impact	Dealing with the numbers presenting

		when the A & BC food parcels became available.			
Helensburgh Foodbanks	16128	537 families supporting 1032 children	Low income; High fuel costs; Single parent households	Numbers reduced to half over the school holidays this may be a result of the extra support.	Difficulty in ensuring all 4 foodbank sessions while ensuring safety of volunteers and attendees. High costs of cleaning, materials.
Kintyre Foodbank	3152 bags	652 adults 214 children 114 families	Universal Credit advances needing to be paid back leaving families stretched, children at home, higher heating costs and food bills	Numbers dropped when support was offered	Keeping staff and recipients safe, losing volunteers who needed to shield as over 70 (great support from South Kintyre Development Trust)
Mull & Iona					The food collected would ordinarily be held in a community fridge for anyone in need to go and help themselves. Mull foodbank come under the auspices of Hope Kitchen and therefore the figures are included in the Oban Hope Kitchen stats.
Jeans Bothy Helensburgh	7000 daily allocations	20 families weekly over 50 weeks	Home schooling; poor mental health; lack of digital access	Not aware.	No issues, we have grown due to the circumstances.

In addition to the great work done by the Food Forum; members have also ensured that a total of 2,000 leaflets went out in food bags to service users, telling them about the Flexible Food Fund and how to apply. As well the CFF has developed a Worrying About Money leaflet, in conjunction with IFAN and this has also been distributed widely.

7. Period Poverty:

Prior to the covid19 pandemic period products were freely available in schools. There was a Lead Officer on this on behalf of Education, implementation and budget was managed by each head teacher. The Council's Commercial Manager was rolling out the community aspect, including provision to young people (and all others) out with schools. The aim was to help improve the reach of reusable products

Following the pandemic, the operation was moved online, with pupils and people in communities able to order their own supplies directly from Hey Girls using online form. The online order enables individuals to order standard supplies as well as reusable products to best suit their needs. In addition the website was updated to reflect these changes, and merged all of the information across both projects into one, for consistency: https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sanitaryprovision

Products remain available in schools. Provision of period products ensure that those people unable to afford such products are not disadvantaged and do not lose any School or social time as a result. A paper has been put forward to appoint a Project Officer post between community and education to take forward statutory actions that will be required with the implementation of the Period Poverty Act.

D. Helping Families in Other Ways:

1. Flexible Fund

The Scottish Government has made available £30 million to local authorities in Scotland to enable them to work with their key planning partners including the Health and Social Care Partnerships and the third sector, to support the needs of people in their communities who don't have support networks and are struggling with the new restrictions or guidance at protection level 4, particularly those most at risk through health or social inequalities.

Argyll and Bute will get £537,000 of funding for this purpose. A report went to the Council on 24 June with a range of projects designed to support the most vulnerable people in our communities. This includes monies to provide training and raise awareness of poverty and how to reduce stigma and improve the ways in which people can be supported, monies to support school clothing grants and set up a new school clothing bank. There are schemes to support young carers and former care experienced youngsters with free gym memberships. It is also proposed that a series of Health, Wellbeing and Advice Service roadshows will be delivered this year to maximise the number of persons that get support across Argyll and Bute. There are plans for more than 20 projects to be delivered across the Council, the Health and Social Care Partnership and the voluntary sector supporting vulnerable people with a range of needs.

2. School Counselling

The counselling in schools service has been developed by NHS Highland in partnership with Argyll and Bute Educational Psychology service. The service is accessible to all children and young people ages 10 to 18 in Argyll and Bute. The service opened for referrals in February 2021 and works with children and young people across the authority. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the service has utilised virtual online platforms to meet and work with young people remotely.

What is it?

Counselling is a therapeutic intervention, which supports health and wellbeing. Counselling offers young people, a safe and supportive environment to talk over difficult issues in confidence. This involves listening to their views, experiences and feelings without judgement, within the context of a safe and trusting relationship characterised by empathy and respect.

Why is it needed?

Approximately 1 in 4 young people within the UK will struggle with their emotional and mental health. A majority of young people who develop mental illness in the UK are unknown to any service and often do not receive the support they need. Mental health services are under significant pressure, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Argyll and Bute HSCP are committed to supporting young people to reach their potential. Counselling can support young people to become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

School counselling is also able to support young people as we recover from the pandemic which has created uncertainty for young people across Scotland. The counselling in schools service aims to reduce pressures on all services by providing an early and accessible wellbeing intervention. This includes ensuring self-referrals enable young people to access support when they need it.

As face to face contact increases and schools return to in person teaching, this will create further pressures and challenges for young people through changes in daily routine, increased social contact and emerging problems that arose during lockdowns.

How do we see the service developing?

A range of quantitative outcome tools are embedded within service practice and are being used to measure young people's progression through counselling and the impact of counselling on wellbeing. At our 6 month review we will assess our service information, incorporating accessibility training to ensure fair, accessible and equitable counselling is provided.

We will gain further qualitative feedback by linking with stakeholders including education, mental health services, and social work to improve the pathway to access counselling. Most importantly, we will listen to young people who access the service to find out how we can improve directly from our service users. We hope the Counselling in Schools service can, as an effective early intervention, reduce and prevent the escalation of wellbeing concerns. This will also reduce pressure on other mental health services and improve outcomes for young people across Argyll and Bute.

For further information please contact: nhsh.counsellinginschools@nhs.scot

3. Infant & Perinatal Mental Health project:

There is a growing understanding of the primacy of relationship in shaping and informing how humans grow, develop and thrive across their lives with regard to both mental and physical health. This includes both the experience of pregnancy and becoming a parent for women (and partners) and how interactions with infants shape their emergent sense of self. This is an area of practice that requires discerning skills and knowledge to ensure opportunities for wellbeing are optimised while avoiding the shame and blame that can too readily undermine experiences of maternity care with regard to both parent: infant and parent: professional relationships.

The primary template for relationships is laid in the first 1001 days, pre-birth to toddlerhood, between infants and their parents/primary carers, even as subsequent life experiences will also have influence. Reflecting this, the infant and perinatal mental health work programme for NHS Highland and Argyll and Bute HSCP is underpinned by the following values;

- A relationship led approach with infants, mums and dads and by colleagues across services and teams
- Systemic thinking between infants, mums and dads professionals/professionals / practitioners / service systems
- A rights led approach with regard to the UNCRC and Equality Legislation
- Trauma informed and responsive: What happened to you? How did this impact on you? Then? Now? Who is helping you now?

Aims

- To better understand and respond to the mental health needs and vulnerabilities of pregnant women and their infants across a continuum of need and risk, informed by the Thrive Approach and Getting It Right For Every Child practice model/s.
- To ensure timely evidence based pathways to assessment and care that are informed and shaped by the experience of women and infants.
- To take an improvement approach to creating and building the skills, capabilities and the capacity of the workforce: maternity services, health visiting,
- To take an improvement approach to creating and building the skills, capabilities and the capacity of parents/carers in understanding and responding to the mental health needs of infants and toddlers.

- To use data that will inform and shape care alongside the experiences of care, as expressed by women and their partners.

Context
Population epidemiology indicates that:

- One in five women will experience mental health difficulties while pregnant and will benefit from the support of family, friends, and helping agencies.
- One in ten women will experience moderate to severe mental health difficulties and require access to psychological therapies available in primary care, maternity services and the third sector.
- One in twenty women, are at risk of severe and complex mental health problems requiring the assessment of specialist perinatal mental health services.
- Women with existing mental health, alcohol and substance misuse difficulties face additional challenges in accessing services and finding the support that will maximise their experience of care and the best outcomes for themselves and their infants/toddlers/children.
- The MMBRACE (2020) study indicates that suicide remains the principal cause of direct death for women one year after delivery of their infant.

COVID-19 Unintended Consequences
COVID-19 is recognised to have created challenges for women and their partners with regard to experiences of maternity care with changes to face to face care and limited partner involvement in key stages of antenatal pathway (routine care, ultra-sound scans, delivery). The Babies in Lockdown Report (2020) in an online survey found that for pregnant women:

- Almost 7 in 10 found their ability to cope with their pregnancy or baby had been impacted as a result of COVID-19.
- Nearly 7 in 10 felt the changes brought about by COVID-19 were affecting their unborn baby, baby or young child.
- Only one third expressed confidence in being able to access mental health support if required.
- Many families with lower incomes, from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and young parents have been hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic and were less likely to receive the support they needed. This is likely to have widened existing inequalities.

Parents and primary carers have also experienced challenges in spending time with their newborn infants where they have required hospital care in Special Care Baby Units (SCBU) and, or, Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU). Some of these difficulties are being perpetuated by interrupted care and by health visitors and wider early weeks and months support with related community restrictions on face to face care and support. Planning for the move out of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated progression out of Lockdown presents opportunities to offset disadvantage and the

potential of harm to infants, toddlers and parents and where trauma informed, and responsive practices will be of particular value.

A Framework for Improvement

The HSCP and associated children and young people's integrated planning partners will take respective responsibility for an improvement approach to developing infant and perinatal mental health operational services and related engagement with women and their partners in the North Highland and Argyll and Bute Partnerships.

In Argyll and Bute, we will have an Advanced Nurse for Perinatal Mental Health working to support our most vulnerable families and work alongside link team members and the wider multi-disciplinary team in each locality and cross boundary to ensure an effective service. There will also be psychiatry and psychology input. Peer support in women with lived experience will be a central part of this service along with working with 3rd sector. A participation and engagement officer role will be key in scoping and developing this work.
An initial benchmarking of staff training and knowledge of PNMH has been undertaken and we will use a quality approach to monitor areas of improvement. Staff training commencing locally in June 2021 will be rolled out to support prior learning modules and to identify "champions" in each team. Primary Care Mental Health team and Community Mental Health teams continue to work closely with Midwives and Health visitors and our families while new PNMH service is established and they will continue to have a key role.

Connecting Scotland Phase 2

20 devices with wifi were distributed to households with children in phase 2 of this project. Recipients were in Kintyre, Bute and Dunoon. Devices mainly went to families with more than one child. Many of the families only had smartphones in the household with limited data. Anecdotal evidence indicates that devices enabled parents & children to access remote hospital appointments using NearMe more easily and support home schooling and application for benefits etc. Also reduced parental isolation as able to join online classes such as Baby Massage

4. Youth Work Education Recovery Learning Programme:

The Community Learning Service has been listening to Young People and their concerns around returning to school and education during COVID-19 and the impact this is having on their health and well-being. We have successfully accessed some national funding to provide activities that will enable us to deliver activities that will address some of these issues and to support young people to return to or remain engaged in their education and learning provision.

We are offering young people from across Argyll and Bute the opportunity to achieve accredited awards and the experience of quality outdoor learning opportunities whilst

developing a range of personal and team skills. The programme will be delivered by Community Learning in partnership with Hebridean Pursuits Outdoor Learning, secondary schools and the Education Psychology Service.

All 10 of Argyll and Bute's secondary schools will be allocated up to 10 places on the programme. Each participant will take part in a personal development programme focused on individual and group health and wellbeing with an outdoor learning focus. Prior to, during, and in between the outdoor learning activity All young people taking part will explore their health and wellbeing through a variety of learning activities and will complete the SQA Health and Wellbeing module. Depending on the capabilities of the young people there may be further wider achievement opportunities such as John Muir awards, Saltire awards, Dynamic Youth awards or in some cases Youth Achievement awards.

Activities will be delivered to achieve core outcomes of increased confidence, self-esteem and resilience, building life-skills, encouraging self-respect, introducing coping mechanisms, improving mental, physical and emotional wellbeing and developing aspirations for the future.

Outcomes:

- Improve Health and Wellbeing.
- Increased engagement in learning
- Raising attainment through recognition of wider learning and achievement (e.g. Youth Awards and accredited certificated awards).

5. **Argyll ACE's Hub; All Our Children:**

At the start of the Covid19 pandemic in January 2020 the third sector group All Our Children, which brings together third sector agencies that work with children and families across Argyll and Bute, created a **Facebook page**. This is an open page which looks to bring a wide of information to people and offer support and advice. Some of its posts have reached as many as 3,000 people and areas covered include:

- School Meals changes and access;
- Parent Club and Cost of Living Advice;
- Best Start Grants;
- Online Safety;
- The Promise;
- Live Argyll;
- Test and Protect;
- Young People and Health Relationship;
- Online Workshops.

This eclectic mix has proven beneficial to many families and even managed to reunite a jacket and school bag with a child in Oban after posting that it had been handed into the Police Station.

6. **Changing Lives Initiative:**

Argyll and Bute has taken part in a 3-year pilot, along with areas in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, looking at improving the lives of children with symptoms of ADHD. The pilot, concluded and reported on in April 2021, saw advice and information, screening and Incredible Years Parenting Training courses offered to parents of children aged between 3 and 7 years who showed behaviours suggesting ADHD. Training in delivering Incredible Year Parenting Programmes was also given to some staff and awareness raising to a larger group. Analysis of the results showed this to be a very successful approach.

Monies have now come to an end, but Argyll and Bute intend to look at how this approach can be carried forward, possibly in conjunction with the third sector. Whilst Argyll and Bute's participation in the partnership was disrupted by the Covid pandemic, advice and parent training and support did continue online and was well received by recipients.

7. **Use of Drone Technology:**

In our last review we reported that with ferry transportation curtailed innovative solutions were piloted; for example the use of Drones to fly tests and drugs to the island of Mull Hospital; this taking only 15 minutes rather than the much longer time a ferry might have taken. The second stage of the Drone pilot continues. This development in Argyll & Bute gives the opportunity to test the capacity for further use of this technology.

Argyll & Bute Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) has begun carrying COVID test samples and other medical materials on drone delivery flights between medical facilities in the Argyll & Bute region. Following a proof-of-concept phase last year, the three-month initiative, which aims to help improve COVID-19 related logistics to and from remote locations, has now been expanded and is fully operational.

E. Partnership Working:

1. The Promise:

In 2021 the Scottish Government Independent Care Review reported and produced "The Promise", a plan to improve care services across Scotland for children and young people. To deliver on The Promise the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership is taking the following actions.

- Set up a Working Group looking at models of practice supporting children remaining within their families; this will include more effective use of Alternative to Care Workers (ATC) and other resources, including working in partnership with the third sector.

- The Dunoon area has the highest level of adult substance misuse and mental health issues. Promise monies are to be used creatively to find multi-agency ways to prevent receptions into care.

- The Working Group will look at the feasibility of accessing social housing in order to create a family friendly space that can be used for family meetings and contact; a place where parental assessments can take place in a supportive environment. This centre would also be used by Health Visitors and other professionals working with children and families.

- A Care experienced Co-chair for the Corporate Parenting Board is to be recruited.

- A Working Group has been set up to look at language and terminology used in care settings and adjusting templates, reports and forms accordingly. For example: care experienced not looked after; brothers and sisters not siblings, meeting your family not contact.

- It has been pledged that in any case where siblings may be placed in care separately; this would have to be reviewed and approved by the Children and Families Head of Service.

- Actions are being taken to recruit more Foster Carers who can take family groups.

2. Trauma Informed Workforce:

Argyll and Bute continue to roll out trauma training across our workforce and are fast approach 75% of the children's workforce having undertaken trauma training. This continues to be delivered through online self-learning materials and the delivery of virtual training sessions, take up has been particularly strong with education colleagues; over 92% of teachers have undertaken the training.

Further training is scheduled through to 2022 to help embed and enhance workforce confidence in applying trauma informed approaches and a programme of trauma enhanced training is commencing in May 2022.

Workforce feedback has been very positive and there is a growing body of evidence of staff changing their approaches. In particular schools are more systematically adopting trauma informed approaches to support the return of pupils to school and as a partnership work has commenced to more formally evaluating the impact of the training

across services which will be used to inform the next phase of roll out and embedding trauma informed approaches across our workforce and services.

3. Advice Services:

Financial and other related areas of advice are key to supporting children and families and helping to move forward in a positive manner. There is partnership working in order to reach as many people as possible and meet their needs; people are also linked to national sources of assistance through Council and Partner web sites, media posts and one to one / online advice meetings.

Council Advice Web Page

- Argyll and Bute Council provides free impartial, confidential advice on welfare rights, complex debt to particularly vulnerable clients, and homelessness. Debt Counselling is an area that is likely to increase, and the Councils debt counselling service will work in conjunction with the Citizens Advice Bureau to support individuals and families.
- Independent advice agencies, including Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau and Bute Advice Centre;
- Argyll and Bute Advice Network (ABAN) is a directory of services, providing information and advice on a range of issues including benefits, housing, carers support, youth services and advice for older people;
- National helplines, including Citizens Advice Scotland; Money Advice Scotland and the National Debt line who provide on-line advice.
- Find a food bank in Argyll and Bute.
- Find out how we are working together to tackle poverty in Argyll and Bute.

This Council web pages have advice and links to:

- advice and support with welfare benefits
- Struggling with debt or money problems
- Find out about and apply for benefits
- Support for people affected by cancer
- If you are homeless or about to become homeless
- Advice about money, family, daily life or your rights
- Create your own personal budget plan here
- Free and confidential advice on debt problems
- Take control of your finances with our budgeting tool
- Directory of advice services in Argyll and Bute
- Looking for a low-cost affordable loan

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/advice-services

4. **Digital Inclusion Update:**

More than ever, getting online is a necessity for people to access public services, connect with family and friends and contribute towards reducing social isolation and loneliness. In Argyll and Bute, the focus of our response to digital needs has been through two projects Connecting Scotland and Digital Connections. Despite issuing a significant number of devices there still remains a steady flow of requests for support.

Connecting Scotland

The Connecting Scotland Programme aims to get 50,000 digitally excluded households across Scotland online by the end of 2021. As well as supplying the devices, "digital champions" have been trained to support people to use the internet confidently and safely.

The devices issued are a mixture of iPad and Chromebooks with MiFi connectivity packs that enable the user to connect via a mobile phone signal. The MiFi packs offer two years free internet access. Although connectivity has improved significantly in Argyll and Bute it continues to be an issue.

Community Learning staff distributed devices during Phase 1, provided set up support and follow up contact to identify problems and ensure that recipients were using the devices. In Phase 2 a range of partners carried out these tasks.

Phase 1 focused on people in the extremely high vulnerability group ('shielding') or the higher risk of severe illness group. Recipients also had to be on low income and without connectivity. Priority was given to those without any devices including mobile phones.

153 new devices and MiFi packs have been issued across Argyll and Bute in Phase 1.

Phase 2 was targeted at older people, disabled people, families with children and care leavers. Devices and support were allocated through a range in partners working directly with these groups including –

- Argyll and Bute Council
- HSCP Midwives
- Argyll and Bute Women's Aid
- Cornerstone Community Care
- Crossroads Cowal and Bute
- Enable Scotland
- Help (Argyll and Bute) Ltd
- MS Centre Mid-Argyll
- West Highland Housing Association

207 new devices and MiFi packs have been issued across Argyll and Bute in Phase 2.

Supplementary Phase

A small number of people have been identified who met the criteria for Phase 1 or Phase 2 but for a number of reasons were not included or offered devices. An additional 19 new devices and MiFi packs have been awarded by Connecting Scotland to assist in addressing this and will be fully allocated by June 2021.

Education

A Scottish Government grant to support digital inclusion, which was allocated on the number of pupils entitled to free school meals, enabled the service to purchase and issue 1356 new devices (Chromebooks and iPads) along with 254 connectivity solutions with 12 months of unlimited data. The connectivity solutions were used to support learners who have poor or slow internet, are reliant on a parent's mobile phone data for connectivity or experience a broadband outage (caused by changing providers or a network fault).

Schools also issued Council owned devices to learners who required a device.

Digital Connections

Digital Connections is an Argyll and Bute partnership project and was established at the start of the pandemic to respond quickly to digital needs. 220 refurbished devices have been purchased and distributed with over 150 devices donated by the local community and businesses. The Digital Connections project complimented the Connecting Scotland project perfectly and, in many cases, we were able to respond to individuals and families requiring support who did not meet the Connecting Scotland criteria.

What Next?

Refurbishing Scheme - there's been a healthy response from the community and businesses to the appeal for devices that can be recycled and redistributed to families and individuals requiring additional digital resources. Discussions are at a very early stage in exploring the viability of developing a project which will access and recycle end of use devices.

Community Learning and Development Plan 2021-24 – the latest version of the CLD Plan is due in September 2021 and is currently in production. It will focus on Covid recovery and it's highly likely that the plan will include digital provision as one of its key themes. Partners are currently engaged in a consultation exercise and will develop a collaborative response to identified need and priorities.

Feedback

As you would perhaps expect, feedback has been very positive with most people reporting that the devices and connectivity have opened up opportunities for them to communicate, learn, shop and stay informed.

We've responded to several families who although they had a device and connectivity, also had more than one child trying to learn online causing issues with access. In some cases, this was further exasperated if the parent was working from home. We also came across families attempting to provide online schooling via a mobile phone and were able to provide solutions.

A sample of some of the comments and feedback we've received regarding digital support through Connecting Scotland and Digital connections: -

"The laptop is a great help as I have been using a phone to access my online classes but haven't been able to download some of the documents on the phone. Many thanks" - S4 pupil.

"This will be such a huge help to the family!"- Parent

'I have completed both the courses that I was struggling to do on my mobile and I'm now looking at options for Self-Employment which is great news!!' – Young Person

F. Other Future, Planned Work:

1. Training:

Training for multi-agency staff in areas relating to child poverty is a focus for the Argyll and Bute CPAG. Money Counts training is being developed for roll out and will increase the awareness of a wide range of front-line staff and equip them to ask the difficult money questions of service users whilst showing respect and understanding.

Localised presentations on benefit levels and what it really means for claimants in terms of hardship in our area are being looked at: myth busting and awareness raising.

In addition, training is planned for covering the whole Community Planning Partnership (CPP). The plan is to ascertain delegate numbers so that a tendering process can take place for a supplier to provide wide ranging overarching training on poverty and supporting people in poverty.

2. Engagement:

- Continue to engage with lived experience people and harder to reach groups via the agencies they connect with.
- Set up a reference group for future engagement.
- Support Council/NHS and partners to continue to consider poverty impacts when looking at policies and development. Ensure that EQIAs and CRWIAs are carried out.

3. Data Analysis:

In the coming year we will map out our key data set and use this to monitor changes in child poverty and related areas. We will also consider what further work on the local evaluation of child poverty and its causes, can be accomplished.