## **NHS Highland**



Meeting: NHS Highland Board

Meeting date: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Title: Highland Child Poverty Action Report

2024/25

**Argyll & Bute Child Poverty Action** 

Report 2024/25

Responsible Executive/Non-Executive: Jennifer Davies, Director of Public

Health; Evan Beswick, Chief Officer

Argyll & Bute HSCP

Report Author: Lynda Thomson, Senior Health

Improvement Specialist; Mandy

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**Report Recommendation:** The Board is asked:

- Consider and note the actions carried out in 2024/25.
- Consider and agree the actions for delivery in 2025/26.
- **Note** the activity to be undertaken during 2025/26 to review the priorities in line with the refresh of the Integrated Children's Services Plan.
- Note the content of the Argyll & Bute Child Poverty Report

### 1 Purpose

This is presented to the Board for:

Approval

This report relates to a:

• Government policy/directive

This report will align to the following NHS Scotland quality ambition(s):

Safe, Effective and Person Centred

This report relates to the following Strategic Outcome(s)

Start Well	Х	Thrive Well	Х	Stay Well	Anchor Well	Χ
Grow Well		Listen Well		Nurture Well	Plan Well	
Care Well		Live Well		Respond Well	Treat Well	
Journey		Age Well		End Well	Value Well	
Well						
Perform well		Progress well		All Well Themes		

### 2 Report summary

### 2.1 Situation

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities and Health Boards to produce annual, joint Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs) which outline progress on identified actions for the previous year and planned actions to tackle child poverty for 25-26.

Reducing Poverty is also a core theme within both our Anchor Strategy and Annual Delivery Plan and links to Highland's Integrated Children's Services Plan and the Highland Community Planning Partnerships Outcome Improvement Plan.

This paper and the attached Highland Child Poverty Action Plan Report provides the requested update. The report covers the Highland area only.

### 2.2 Background

In line with the legislation, Highland Council and NHS Highland have led a review of 2024/25 actions taken to reduce child poverty and, in discussion with partners at the Highland CPP Reducing Poverty Group, identified the actions required in 2025/26.

Preparation has also begun for the development of the next Child Poverty Action Plan, aligned with the Highland Integrated Children's Plan for 2026 – 2031. This will come to the Board for approval in Summer of 26.

### 2.3 Assessment

The report provides an update to Board members on:

- Current Data from the Public Health, Health Intelligence team and Public Health Scotland.
- Progress made and outcomes achieved in tackling child poverty in 2024/25
- Proposed actions to be taken in 2025/26 in line with the key themes identified within the Highland's Integrated Children's Service Plan.

The key drivers that influence the experience of child poverty include income from employment, costs of living and income from social security and benefits in kind.

Whilst many children's services remain under the provision of Highland Council, NHS Boards have been asked to focus on four identified priority areas to tackle child poverty. These are:

- leadership and accountability,
- staff training,
- our role as an anchor organisation focusing on parental employment

procurement and income maximisation.

The Highland LCPAR incorporates actions that will support NHS Highland to meet the four identified priority areas outlined above and delivery of NHS Highlands Anchor Strategic Plan.

### **Argyll & Bute Child Poverty Action Plan:**

The Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2024-2025 is a review of the Child Poverty Action Plan first published in 2019. It is a requirement under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 that local authorities and health boards jointly produce and publish an annual review of their plan, setting out work being undertaken to tackle child poverty in their region. This action is required up until 2030. The Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Group, led by Evan Beswick (Chief Officer; Argyll & Bute Health and Social Care Partnership) have produced this year's review, it reflects a children's rights approach children and young people are currently coproducing an updated graphic, plan on a page version of the plan. This will be published with the substantive plan. The review also seeks to reflect the vision that: 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.

The report notes that although some progress has been made in tackling child poverty in Scotland, because of factors such as the Scottish Child Payment and other national and local actions, child poverty is still very much with us. The Foreword to this report mentions Danny Dorling, who in his Book "Seven Children; Inequality and Britain's Next Generation" 2024, noted that: In the seven most recent years surveyed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2014 – 2021, child poverty has risen faster in the UK than in any comparable country worldwide. Page 171 Agenda Item 10 2 This report also sets out the challenges of tackling child poverty in Argyll and Bute goes on to show what progress has been made in the various key areas of the plan, including employability, housing, education, benefits, data analysis and fuel poverty. It acknowledges the work of the Council, the Health Board and their partners in continuing to work together to tackle child poverty. 3.1 Other front Sections of the Report are: • Child Friendly Version of the Plan • Integrated Impact Assessments • Data and Child Poverty • Taking Action on Rural Poverty • Child Poverty and Mental Health • The Promise and Whole Family Support The Main Plan This section of the report reviews progress and changes in key areas of the plan and is laid out as always, in the following sections: A. Increasing Income from Employment and Earnings. B. Increasing Income through Benefits C. Cost of Living D. Helping Families in Other Ways E. Other Planned Work

### 2.4 Proposed level of Assurance

This report proposes the following level of assurance:

Substantial	Х	Moderate	
Limited		None	

### Comment on the level of assurance.

The attached update reports have taken the level of assurance to Substantial. Planning has already begun for the next update of the Highland Child Poverty Action Plan. This is now closely aligned with the Integrated Children's Service Planning Board and the Highland CPP Reducing Poverty Group have been working closely with the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland to develop the next plan.

Work is underway on the Argyll & Bute plan.

### 3 Impact Analysis

### 3.1 Quality/ Patient Care

Poverty has an impact on the health and wellbeing of communities and specifically for children living in families impacted by poverty. Prioritised and sustained delivery on the identified actions can mitigate some of the worst effects of poverty and reduce the gap in health inequalities for communities who are the most disadvantaged.

### 3.2 Workforce

A route out of poverty can be through access to good quality jobs and Fair Work. NHS Highland is a major employer and can therefore provide increased opportunities. We seek to not only support our workforce through Fair Work and reasonable pay, but also to offer this opportunity to those furthest from the job market and seeking employment. The new employability strategy seeks to widen access that will be inclusive of people living in poverty.

### 3.3 Financial

Many of the actions detailed in the plan rely on doing things differently or in partnership rather than requiring specific financial resources. Some actions may require additional workforce commitment or funding going forward, but there are no specific financial risks identified in the delivery of the plan.

### 3.4 Risk Assessment/Management

There are risks if actions on child poverty are not undertaken. These are primarily long-term risks in relation to poorer health outcomes for children living

in poverty. There are reputational risks if NHS Highland does not deliver on the priority actions identified in the report.

### 3.5 Data Protection

There are no identified Data Protection issues in delivery of the actions.

### 3.6 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

The actions are targeted to those most in need and living in poverty. A completed Equality Impact Assessment is attached.

### 3.7 Other impacts

No other impacts to note.

### 3.8 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

This is an update report and so areas of communication, involvement and engagement have formed part of the original report.

### 3.9 Route to the Meeting

This update report has been considered and supported by the Highland's Integrated Children's Service Planning Board which provides partnership oversight to delivery of the plan and also approved through Highland Councils Communities and Place Committee on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 25.

### 4 Appendices

The following appendices are included with this report:

**Appendix 1** – Highland Local Child Poverty Action Update Report April 2024 – March 2025.

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment and UNCR Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – Argyll & Bute Child Friendly Action Plan Update

Appendix 4 – Argyll and Bute Action Plan report 2024/25







Com-pàirteachas
Dealbhadh
Coimhearsnachd
na Gàidhealtachd

# Highland Local Child Poverty Action Update Report April 2024 to March 2025

### The Approach in Highland

There is a strong commitment in Highland to address poverty and inequality within individual agencies and across the Community Planning Partnership. The vision for the Community Planning Partnership through its Highland Outcome Improvement Plan is:

"Maximise Opportunities and Tackle Inequality to Build a Thriving Highlands for All"

This is underpinned by three high level strategic priorities:

- People Enable people to live independently, safe and well within their community
- Place Work in partnership to develop sustainable and resilient local communities
- Prosperity Creating opportunities for all people and places to prosper and to thrive economically

The Highland Community Planning Partnership brings together public agencies, third sector organisations and other key community groups to work collaboratively with the people of Highland to deliver better outcomes.

The Highland Community Planning Partnership works strategically at a Highland level, through a series of nine geographical local Community Partnerships as well as regional thematic groups. Ultimately these deliver our Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan sets out the vision, purpose and focus for the Highland Community Planning Partnership from 2024-2027. The partnership believes working towards this plan will have a significant impact on reducing inequalities in Highland.

Reducing child poverty is a priority theme within the <u>Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan</u> which sits within a context of the Community Planning Partnership and delivering against the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

Our partnership recognises that children's services planning and planning to reduce child poverty is an

The Child Protection
Committee

The Promise Board

Rights and Participation

Rights and Participation

Poverty Reduction

Rights and Participation

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ongoing process and that central to good planning is to ensure robust connections between all national and local strategic planning. Our child poverty plan connects the partnership strategic planning within a single framework. This framework provides both the tools for planning, self-evaluation, reporting, performance management and assurance.

Our child poverty plan articulates how partners work together to provide services which are organised, equipped to deliver high-quality, joined-up, trauma-informed and responsive and preventative support to children, young people and families.

Highland's Integrated Children's Services Board provides oversight to the on-going work of the plan. This group has broad membership, including lead officers from The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and a number of Third Sector organisations. The

Board reports to the Community Planning Partnership Board with additional reporting to Highland Council and NHS Highland Board.

The process to review the Integrated Children's Services Plan (ICSP) began during 2022/23. A Strategic Needs Assessment was undertaken to create the evidence base for the new plan. Child Poverty remains a core priority of the ICSP and the actions developed through that process are reflected in section three as actions for 2023/24 – 2025/6. The Integrated Children's Service Annual Report for 2024-2025 can be found here

A life courses approach has been taken to the plan and actions are structured under three life course stages: **Getting Started** (pre-birth to school), **Growing Up** (primary) and **Moving On** (secondary to young adult).

### 1.1 Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

In 2017, the Scottish Government introduced the <u>Child Poverty (Scotland) Act.</u> This replaced the previous UK Child Poverty Act 2010 and included duties on both the Scottish Government and local partners to address child poverty. It also introduced income targets as a driver for reducing child poverty across Scotland. Child poverty can have negative effects on the health, wellbeing and educational attainment of the children who experience it. It also has a wider cost for society<sup>1</sup>. By introducing a Child Poverty Act, which sets out clear targets for reducing the number of children living in poverty, progress can be monitored on meeting these targets.

### The legislation requires:

- The Scottish Government to produce a Child Poverty Delivery Plan every four years highlighting how it intends to meet the child poverty targets laid out in the Act. It must also publish annual progress reports setting out progress towards meeting the child poverty targets. The Scottish Government's second Delivery Plan Best Start Bright Futures, sets out policies and proposals to help reach the child poverty targets set for 2030.
- Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports which set out activities that have been undertaken in the Local Authority area during the previous year to reduce child poverty and contribute to the delivery of the national targets and any planned future activities.

Evidence suggests that there are three key drivers which influence the experience of child poverty. These are income from employment, costs of living and income from social security and benefits. These drivers are set out in figure 1 below.

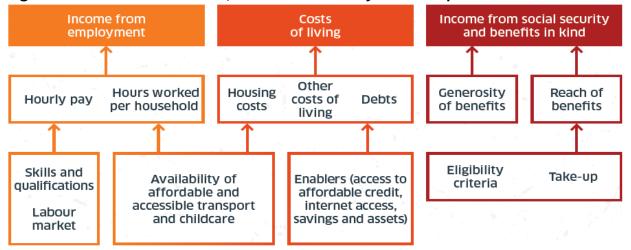


Figure 1: Scottish Government, Local Child Poverty Action Report Guidance 2018

Increasing incomes and reducing costs of living are mechanisms for reducing child poverty but there are many other actions that take place to improve children's quality of life and life chances.

 $<sup>^1</sup>$  A 2023 study found that child poverty in the UK was costing over £39 billion a year -  $\frac{\text{https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-child-poverty-2023\#:} \sim \frac{\text{https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-child-poverty-2023\#:} \sim \frac{\text{https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-child-poverty-child-poverty-2023\#:} \sim \frac{\text{https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-child-poverty$ 

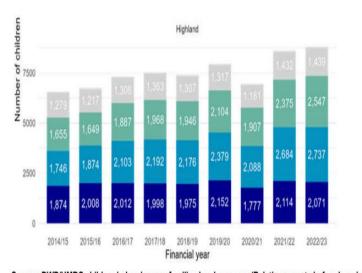
### 1.2 Child Poverty in Highland

There is a large body of evidence that poverty harms children's health, wellbeing and educational opportunities. Rural and island life characteristics are recognised as potential compounders of low earning and higher cost of living.

In 2022/23, 7,355 children under 16 lived in low-income families below the poverty line in Highland

Nationally, six in ten children in poverty live in households where someone is working. Inwork poverty remains more common that out-of-work poverty in all areas.

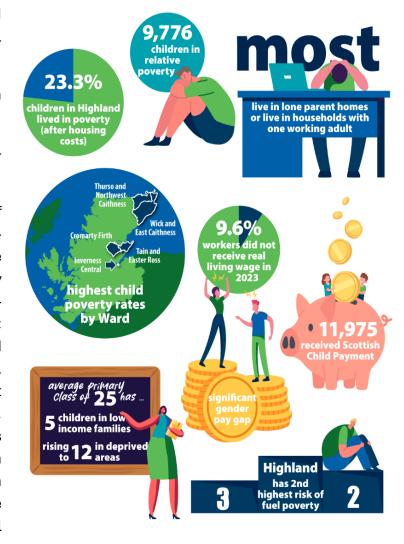
Figure 3: Number of children in low-income families in Highland



Source: DWP/HMRC children in low-income families local measure (Relative poverty before housing costs)

Nearly three-quarters of people experiencing inpoverty work have someone in their family who works in five highpriority industries: hospitality, health and social retail, care, administrative support manufacturing. and Many of these industries are large employers in Highland with a high proportion of part-time workers and seasonal variation.

5-10



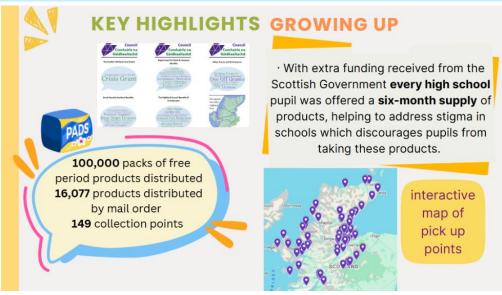
Full, recent data set on Child Poverty available in Appendix

### 1.3 Summary of Actions carried out in 2024-2025

The actions to address Child Poverty in 2024/25 are outlined below and reflect those agreed as part of the new Integrated Children's Service's Plan 2023-2026, where one of the core priorities is Child Poverty. Child Poverty has been a core priority of the Integrated Children's Service's Plan since 2021 however the actions identified for the 2024/25 plan reflect the life courses approach taken throughout the whole plan. This reflects a new approach for the child poverty action plan.

The partnership actions to address child poverty are aligned to the Integrated Children's Plan and are reported as part of the Integrated Children's Service Plan monitoring.







### Section 2: Action in Highland - What have we done to address Child Poverty in 2024/25

### Theme 1: Getting Started - Pre-birth - 5 years

### Improvement priority:

We will reduce the financial barriers in order to increase participation, raise aspirations and address the impacts of poverty.

### 1.1 Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas

### What we said we would do in 2024/25

# Develop and pilot an Integrated Single Care Model (SCM) in one or 2 areas in Highland.

- Continue to push for flexibility and a rural childcare approach/policy including childminding
- Provide a toolkit of flexible childcare options for rural communities
- Develop and deliver the parental employability programme
- Plan and develop a pilot for the Caithness area for childcare to support parents who want to undertake work experience. Local employers will be approached to partake in this pilot.

### What we did

- Funding secured from Scottish Government Addressing Depopulation Action Plan fund enabled Highland Council (THC), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), and CALA to collaborate with consultants to develop business plans for new childcare models. Models aim to provide flexible and affordable childcare in rural communities, supporting parental employment and addressing underemployment in key sectors.
- Business plan submitted to the Scottish Government's ADAP team at the end of April 25.
- Evidence report prepared and submitted to Ministers Ms Don-Innes (Children, Young People and the Promise) and Ms Todd (Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport) to support the case for regulatory change. Report has been endorsed by HIREP and its childcare sub-committee and was discussed at CoHI.
- Progress continues on the development and piloting of an Integrated Single Care Model (SCM) in Highland. The initiative now transitioning into the development and implementation phase, with two pathway communities identified. Community engagement is planned as part of the next steps.
- Positive engagement with regulatory agencies and the Scottish Government, who are supportive of the initiative. However, further legal advice from the Care Inspectorate is still awaited.
- CALA presented on the SCM at the CPP Conference and will collaborate with THC and HIE to submit a follow-up report to the next CPP meeting. This report will outline key asks to help address barriers and support the next phase of implementation.
- Toolkit developed of flexible childcare options for rural communities

Parental employability programme – see section 3 for update

### 1.2 Implement the Whole Family Approach to mitigate the impacts of poverty

# Whole Family Wellbeing Programme fund:

- Allocate Element 1 funding
- Building Linkages between schools
- Recruit Holistic Whole Family Support Workers
- Pilot service to person approaches within Local areas

# Whole Family Wellbeing Programme fund: Building Linkages between schools and local food provision

- Partnership formed between CALA, Thriving Families and Home-Start East Highland to provide Holistic Whole Family Support through a Home-School Link model within the Inverness High School ASG area.
- Three Holistic Whole Family Support Workers are now recruited to post, each provider hosting one post across the alliance. This is a significant step forward with the first Programme led, Holistic Whole Family Support worker posts commencing in Highland
- WFW local partnership networks groups established all 9 Community Partnership Areas.





Element 1 Fund (£286,583.64), a total of 32 projects funded across Highland tackling poverty and inequalities by providing support and wellbeing activities to reach the six priority family group.

Element 2 Fund (£1,257,308.00) has been awarded to the following organisations/partnerships:

### Thriving Families

 To make a significant contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs across Highland. This will be achieved by increasing the holistic, flexible, tailored, one-to-one support available to families and their wider circles of support by expanding the capacity of Thriving Families to deliver this support across Highland.

### • Autism and Neurodiversity North Scotland

o Implementation of a leading neurodiverse specific facility in Dingwall, from which newly recruited and trained A-ND staff will deliver specialised neurodiverse specific Outreach Support Services and a Day Care of Children Services, which includes a playscheme and afterschool club for neurodiverse children and young people.

### Kooth

For the past 12 months Kooth have been funded from the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme fund. As the contract has reached renewal a solution was sought for future funding for the contract. The Change Leadership Group have agreed that the CYP Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund will be utilised to cover the 12-month contract for Kooth for FY 2025/2026. Kooth provides anonymous on-line therapeutic content and activities, peer support which is pre-moderated to ensure safety and professional support through asynchronous messaging and live chat functionality.

### Contextual Safeguarding Project

- O The Contextual Safeguarding Project is a partnership between Action for Children, Barnardos, The Anchor Project, Police Scotland and Highland Child Protection Committee. The multi-agency team will be co-located in Rail House, Inverness alongside existing Action for Children and Anchor spaces. This will enable improved collaborative working and a 'four rooms' approach for families in a single setting (this will be replicated in buildings across Highland which have been created using Bairns' Hoose standards). The project will be supported by an Exploitation Steering Group to continue to develop contextual safeguarding approaches for children and young people at risk of community harm.
- The project has been developed using the Scottish Approach to Service Design methodology using the voices of practitioners and young people, as well as selfevaluation and wider quality assurance work. It was also developed in response to the Inspection of Children's Services for children at risk of harm in 2022 where responses to community harm were highlighted as an area for improvement.

- The funding for this project will come from 3 sources Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, Bairns' Hoose funding (through Child Protection Committee) and Whole Family Wellbeing Programme. This demonstrates the key elements required to address Exploitation through a Holistic Contextual Safeguarding approach.
- The project aims to bring together and scale up existing programmes to support young people affected by community harm and in particular, those at risk of Exploitation. Community harm can include risks relating to exploitation, youth justice, drugs and alcohol, harmful sexual behaviour and regular missing episodes. To date, the project has established that many young people accessing the services have multiple vulnerabilities within the community, often being on the edge of justice services, whilst being victims of Exploitation.
- Whilst specialist services can provide intensive and direct support to the young person, support for families (and the wider community) to help reduce the risks and vulnerabilities is required to avoid an escalation of harm, and prevent young people being removed from their family and/or Highland for their own safety.
- At present, Side-Step and RISE are offered as two distinct services along with support from Youth Action, HOST and ISS. This project aims to create an overarching Contextual Safeguarding Framework with a joined-up service to enable seamless support for young people and their families. This meets the Bairns' Hoose standards of having a 'four rooms' approach in one space – families should not have to seek out support, the support should be brought to them in a comfortable and safe setting.

### Seasons for Growth

- Seasons for Growth is a small group change, loss and bereavement programme that is delivered across Highland, mostly within a school setting. It is a universal small group, psychoeducational intervention which supports children and young people (and their families) who are experiencing significant change or loss, which ideally would be available to all families across Highland. Where there is capacity and the programme has become embedded, children and young people self-refer to the group due to hearing about it via assemblies, from staff in their school or their peers recommending it to them.
- A variety of staff from a range of professions have attended two-day training to deliver the CYP Programme and some who have furthered that training and attended a one-day Parent Programme Training, allowing them to deliver small group programmes to Parents

too. There are 237 trained CYP companions, of which 29 have gone on to train in the Parent Programme. These staff are predominantly Highland Council employees, based in our schools and across Health & Social Care. There are a further 20 staff trained in the Third Sector in organisations such as Young Carers and the Ministry of Defence.

o To develop this further, plans exist to enable support for staff from partner agencies to undertake the CYP Programme training and deliver a group so that they can become accredited in the CYP programme which in turn would allow them to train to deliver the Parent Programme. This would create capacity in the system.

### • Infant Feeding Support Worker/NNU/Maternity Project

 Aims to provide holistic whole family support in both the NNU and children's ward, providing specialist breastfeeding input to every family who needs that support at the right time to fulfil the child's right to optimal nutrition in turn giving the most associated shortand long-term health benefits.

### Infant Feeding Support Worker/CALA Project

 Is a collaborative project in partnership with NHSH Infant Feeding Support Worker team and CALA. This will ensure that women are supported by NHS Infant feeding support workers to improve breastfeeding outcomes but also ensure that groups are available in all areas of Highland providing continued feeding support but widening this to relationship building, play and nurture.

### **Employability**

▶ Develop and implement a pilot project aimed at progressing unemployed parents in the Wick area into employment, with the SCQF Level 4/5 Employability Award re-designed for adults at its heart and with input from local employers throughout. Childcare, transport, lunch, and all materials will be provided to enable attendance. If successful, the plan would be to roll

Home Start Caithness have started to deliver the initial phase of the project, providing employability support to a group of parents in Wick. The next phase of the project will be to conduct a survey amongst a wider cohort of parents to help determine demand and identified needs. A key ambition for the project is to help parents achieve work readiness and connect them with local employers.

out the programme to other towns across Highland.

### Multiply

Further delivery of projects across the Highlands and sessions to boost numeracy confidence in everyday life ranging from outdoor family fun days to weekly activities within highlife libraries for families to explore everyday numeracy through games, crafts and play. Introduce additional evening classes to achieve maths qualifications and develop digital tools to support learning

### Multiply activity (2023-2025)

- The Multiply interventions delivered support to those over 16, helping improve their functional numeracy skills through free personal tutoring and digital training. The Multiply programme had contracts with 12 providers across Highland to deliver a range of initiatives.
- These providers support a range of individuals, including young people who are at risk of being left behind as a result of their personal challenges, those with disabilities and those facing poverty, homelessness and long-term unemployment.
- Courses delivered included those designed to increase confidence in numbers, encourage
  people to upskill to access jobs/careers and use numeracy to manage money. There was also
  targeted support to prisoners or those recently released and their families to enhance numeracy
  skills and give the best chance for community re-integration.
- As part of The Highland Council's proactive approach to achieving positive outcomes in this area,
  Highland Multiply projects were offered a 2 month extension to February 2025 which enabled
  continued delivery. Multiply provider reporting indicates that the outputs delivered significantly
  exceed the original targets, and these outputs are summarised as follows:
  - o 881 adult numeracy courses were run in Highland through Multiply
  - o 4,964 individuals participated in Multiply funded courses
  - o 1,207 individuals achieved a qualification
  - o 171 individuals were referred from partners onto upskill courses
- To continue the legacy of Multiply, UHI North, West and Hebrides launched a free online resource
  to help people build confidence with their numeracy skills which the Highland Council actively
  promoted internally and via social media. The <u>Multiply Highland</u> online resource is a series of
  short interactive modules based on real-life numeracy scenario challenges, such as adding up a
  bill or reading a pay slip. They are aimed at adults looking to develop number confidence for
  work, career progression, budgeting, or everyday life.

### 1.3 Develop financial inclusion pathways

- Adapt Food Insecurity Pathway for families with infants to access emergency formula milk.
- Provide Access to emergency funds for families in remote and rural areas and explore cash first approaches.
- Explore what measures can be put in place to provide assurance on the delivery of the FI Pathway
- Cash first approaches are difficult in remote and rural areas. Argyll and Bute have newly developed, an emergency voucher scheme which may be able to be adapted for North Highland and provide a solution. Explore other models of good practice in remote and rural areas to support cash first approaches. Update The Highland Information Trail.
- Provide information on the maternity section of the NHS Highland website. This will enable the information to be reviewed/updated every quarter.

- The Food Insecurity (FI) Pathway in Highland continues to build on the previously funded referral model between the Highland Council's Welfare Support Team and Health Visitors, which has successfully supported families with income maximisation and benefit checks.
- A Steering Group has been established to advance the FI Pathway, currently focusing on gathering data on user experiences and the distribution of formula across Highland. HALO has joined the group and will lead service delivery in the region, with funding to be secured through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP).
- The current Welfare Advice and Health Partnership (WAHP), funded until March 2025, continues to operate in rural GP practices and will remain active based on demand.
- Additionally, the Welfare Support Team has been providing fortnightly support at Dingwall and Invergordon Job Centres throughout 2024, focusing on financial checks, particularly for disabilityrelated claims. Portree and Fort William Job Centres began receiving this support from 4 February 2025.

### Develop financial inclusion (FI) pathways

- FI pathways between the HC Welfare Support Team & Health Visitors continue to go from strength to strength with the Welfare Support team assisting families with income maximisation and benefit checks.
- Improvement services pathway Welfare Advice and Health partnership (WAHP) HC welfare support team are present at various GP practices across rural Highland.
- Job Centre Plus Welfare support present weekly/fortnightly in Dingwall, Invergordon, Portree and Fort William Job centres assisting families with financial checks, disabilities reviews and appeals.
- New on-line referral route for schools directly into Welfare support to assist with families facing crisis. Being rolled out May/June to Headteacher/guidance teacher team meetings

### Theme 2: Growing Up - Primary Years

### Improvement priority:

Mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis

### 2.1 Increase the uptake of sanitary products in schools and other public sector facilities.

### What we said we would do in 2024/25

### Ensure free period products are available in Highland to everyone who needs them.

- Raise awareness of how to access free period products through community collection, schools or home delivery run by Highland Council or through GP distribution model run by Health Information Service (HIRS)
- Increase in product take-up from young people

### What we did

- Team attended various events across the summer including Belladrum Music Festival, Inverness Highland Games, Pop up shops in Eastgate Centre, Vision 26 at Inverness Leisure Centre with over 100,000 packs of free period products distributed
- 16,077 products were distributed by mail order in 2024/25
- 149 collection points have been established around Highland, including GP Surgeries,
   Community Centres and Highland Council service points. A map of all locations can be found here <u>Map Pickup Locations</u>
- A variety of products can be ordered from the Highland Council Website and delivered by mail for those who are unable to attend at a collection point
- There is significant demand in populated areas with existing collection points but a lower uptake in rural areas.
- With extra funding received from the Scottish Government every high school pupil was offered a six-month supply of products, helping to address stigma in schools which discourages pupils from taking these products.

### 2.2 Roll out cost of the school day toolkit

- Increase the number of schools using the toolkit
- Education Scotland Attainment Officer continues to progress Cost of the School Day programme, including meetings with Head Teachers to share good practice. Further update will be available in 2025/26 report.

### Theme 3: Moving On - Secondary and Young Adulthood

### Improvement Priority:

We will raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap

### 3.1 Raise awareness of the impact of poverty amongst children and young people

### What we said we would do in 2024/25

- Develop and pilot a Money Counts 3 course designed to support teams and services to become more poverty sensitive
- Undertake a 3-6 month post evaluation survey for those attending the course
- Improve our shared understanding and use of data
- Embed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Whole Family Wellbeing Strategic Assessment

### What we did

### **Money Counts Training**

This continues to be offered as a means of increasing the number and quality of conversations around money worries. The training highlights the "Worrying About Money?" leaflet and app as tools to support individuals access a range of appropriate support services and organisations.

Money Counts Training delivered since April 24:

- 5 Brief Conversations (Money Counts 1) courses
- 4 Supportive Conversations (Money Counts 2) courses
- Poverty Informed Practice (Money Counts 3) course was developed in 24/25 and is designed to support services to be more poverty sensitive. 2 courses run in 24/25
- Positive feedback from evaluation included: "training was useful to think about language"; "when checklist was used within a service it was thought provoking".



### Improve our understanding and use of data

Data Group has been established as part of PRG. Feedback from the Improvement Service suggests a need to ensure that data is used to identify priorities and actions. Work is underway to explore data requirements regarding health inequalities and the development of a dashboard to monitor progress at

HCPP level. Important to ensure that info is shared and relevant. Potential for a data hub to support work across the CPP priorities.

Embed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Whole Family Wellbeing Strategic Assessment
Collection of feedback from families and lived experience to find out what worked, what didn't, how
things could be improved. This will support future planning within the Poverty Reduction Delivery Group

### 3.2 Roll out the Family First approach

- Reduce the numbers of children in external residential provision
- Increase the proportion of children in kinship care
- Increase the number of foster carers
- Increase community services and supports
- Implement the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme in Highland.

The most effective protection of children involves early support within the family, before urgent action is needed. In Highland, this relates to the 'Family First' approach and the Whole Family Wellbeing programme. If children do require placement away from home, real protection involves attuned, trauma-informed and sufficiently sustained support towards reunification, or towards an alternative secure home base when this is not possible.

### Reduce the numbers of children in external residential provision

The numbers of placements outwith Highland were at the lowest level ever recorded at 9 placements in Oct 2023 but have since increased again to 17, 2 placements above the target. This is a result of several larger families coming into spot purchased residential care and a number of young people with needs and behaviour that required specialist placements outwith Highland. Work is continually targeted through the Home to Highland Programme to reduce the number of children in residential placements outwith Highland.

### Increase the proportion of children in kinship care

The lack of increase in overall figures underlies plans to develop a specific Kinship Team to find family members, assess potential carers and offer support thereafter. Proposals have been submitted in respect of this. Whilst the number of children looked after in kinship has not risen in line with the target, there has been an increase of children living in kinship arrangements under a residence order. In June 2024 there were 135 children across 100 households that had residence orders, an increase of 12 from the previous year. These children are cared for by friends & family, but they are not officially classed as looked after children by the Scottish Government in data returns.

### Increase the number of foster carers

Family First Strategy is about supporting children to remain at home with their parents, where this is safe to do so, and by providing additional support and scaffolding to families who might need this at different times, to ensure their children's wellbeing and safety is supported. Fostering is an integral part of the Family First strategy and for this to be a success the service needs to retain the current cohort of carers and recruit many more for children and young people of all ages so that we increase the number of local foster placements available for alternative Family-Based Care. Highland Council continues efforts to recruit new Foster careers including supporting Foster Care Fortnight (13-16 May 2024) with a series of online information sessions to encourage new foster careers.

### 3.3 Identify way to provided targeted support within universal services.

- Deliver 8 Money Counts courses to 40 people over the course of the year-through NHS Highland Public Health training programme.
- Distribute around 1500 IFAN Worrying About Money leaflets in 24/25 to those in need of financial support

### **Employability**

- Aim to work with 300 parents on their journey towards employment
- Identify parents that could benefit from offers from employability service.
- Support private sector take on employability clients in-work progression
- Launch WorkLifeHighland.co.uk
- Develop further links between NHSH employability plans and HC to

### Worrying About Money leaflets/ WAM app

- **1517 WAM leaflets distributed in 24/25** by the Health Improvement Resource Service (does not include downloads of the online version)
- Figures for the WAM app for 2024 indicate 2.4k views in the year, 218 active users (including 48 new users) and average engagement time of 2 mins 05 sec.
- This provides a helpful baseline for updates of figures in 2025. The annual review of the app has been completed.













support young people and parents into employment.

### Aim to work with 300 parents on their journey towards employment

Highland Council Employability team supported 266 parents in 24/25. 175 were out-of-work parents and 91 were in-work parents seeking to improve their labour market position.

### Identify parents that could benefit from offers from employability service.

The Employability Child Poverty Co-ordinator (ECPC) continues to engage with Job Centre and CAB staff across Highland to identify parents that could benefit from employability support.

### Support private sector take on employability clients in-work progression

A full-time Employer Engagement officer has been appointed to the team and is working closely with employer organisations including Chambers of Commerce, FSB, DYW and Business Gateway and individual businesses of varying sizes - to ensure a stronger connection with employability clients.

### Launch WorkLifeHighland.co.uk

www.worklifehighland.co.uk is now up and running and accompanied by an active social media presence using the WLH brand. To date 3,600 individuals have visited the site since the launch in October 2024.

# Develop further links between NHSH employability plans and HC to support young people and parents into employment.

NHSH and HC have been working closely over the last few months with members of the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP). A "Fast Track to a New Career in Care" recruitment in Fort William on 9th April was supported by several HEP partners, including HC. The event allowed candidates to discover the range of posts on offer, receive help with completing their application and be interviewed – all on the same day. 20+ candidates inc. young people and parents secured employment because of the event.

### Section 3: What are we planning to do to address Child Poverty in 2025/26

In the final year of the current Highland Local Child Poverty Action Plan 2023-26 we will continue to deliver actions to address Child Poverty according to the life courses approach outlined below, reflecting priorities agreed as part of the Integrated Children's Service's Plan 2023-2026, where one of the core priorities is Child Poverty. Further detail is given below.

Getting Started	Growing Up	Moving On:
Pre-birth – 5 years	Primary Years	Secondary/Young Adulthood
1.1 Develop flexible models of	2.1 Increase the uptake of sanitary	3.1 Raise awareness of the impact
childcare in rural areas	products in schools and other	of poverty amongst children and
	public sector facilities.	young people
1.2 Implement the Whole Family	2.2 Roll out cost of the school day	3.2 Roll out the Family First
Approach to mitigate the impacts	toolkit	approach
of poverty		
1.3 Develop financial inclusion		3.3 Identify way to provided
pathways		targeted support within universal
		services.

### Preparing for the 2026-2031 Highland Local Child Poverty Action Plan

Work has started on developing the next Local Child Poverty Action Plan. With support from the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland, the Highland Poverty Reduction Delivery Group partners completed a self-assessment survey. The results were collated in a report and examined at a workshop held in May 2025 which resulted in three improvement statements to help the group start to develop the 2026-31 Plan:

- Work with those with Lived Experience, specifically identified priority groups, to help to identify gaps and priorities for improvement and to work together to design solutions.
- Work in partnership with other services and partners to develop a shared understanding of current needs and existing actions to address poverty.
- Be data informed in identifying need and measuring success/progress.

The Poverty Reduction Delivery Group is now focusing on how to deliver these improved approaches to understanding and addressing child poverty in Highland.

With reference to the 26-31 Plan, while the Scottish Government's child poverty targets, the 6 priority family groups and addressing the drivers of poverty remain central to the approach in Highland, the 2026-31 plan is likely to take a broader view than the current plan, to include a wider range of issues that drive child and family poverty including housing, transport and rurality, and to engage with a wider range of partners across the public, private and third sectors. The broader approach will also allow the Poverty Reduction Delivery Group partners to be more responsive, giving space for those with lived experiences to influence partners' responses to addressing poverty; to better understand what the data is telling us; and to respond to the findings and challenges posed by the recently announced Highland Poverty Commission.

### Theme 1: Getting Started Pre-birth - 5 years

### Improvement priority:

We will Reduce the Financial Barriers in Order to Increase Participation, Raise Aspirations and Address the Impacts of Poverty.

Actions	Priority Actions for 2025/26			
1.1 Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas	<ul> <li>Develop and pilot an Integrated Single Care Model (SCM) in one or two areas in Highland.</li> <li>Continue to push for flexibility and a rural childcare approach/policy including childminding</li> <li>Roll out toolkit of flexible childcare options for rural communities</li> <li>Continue to develop and deliver the parental employability programme and linking into childcare work experience opportunities where appropriate</li> </ul>			
1.2 Implement the Whole Family Approach to	Whole Family Wellbeing Programme			
mitigate the impacts of poverty	<ul> <li>Continue the WFWP funding strategy through WFWP Locality Coordinators working in 9 local partnership groups across Highland to support services that address the needs of the 6 priority family types. The Tier 1 (£10K) and Tier 2 (2 x £50K per local partnership) funding streams are both open on a rolling programme.</li> <li>Promote the WFWP self-assessment toolkit as a tool for partners to help improve and align their services and activities with child poverty reduction priorities. The tool will also provide useful intelligence on community activity across Highland</li> <li>Building on three Inverness High School pilot, develop the Family Links future operation model through schools and/or communities in partnership with the third sector</li> </ul>			

	<ul> <li>Employability</li> <li>HomeStart Caithness have started to deliver the initial phase of the Wick Employability pilot project, providing employability support to a group of parents in Wick. The next phase will be to conduct a survey amongst a wider cohort of parents to help determine demand and identified needs. A key ambition for the project is to help parents achieve work readiness and connect them with local employers.</li> <li>The Employability and Whole Family Well-being teams continue to work together on a range of activities. Community engagement activity has progressed in collaboration with the recently appointed HTSI Employability Development Officer. A key part of this work is to promote Work. Life. Highland to groups across the Highland, encourage them to promote the service to potential clients and discuss possible future engagement events.</li> </ul>
1.3 Develop financial inclusion pathways	<ul> <li>Adapt FI Pathway for families with infants to access emergency formula milk.</li> <li>Develop a route to access emergency funds for families in remote and rural areas and explore cash first approaches.</li> <li>Explore what measures can be put in place to provide assurance on the delivery of the FI Pathway</li> <li>Cash first approaches are difficult in remote and rural areas. Argyll and Bute have newly developed, an emergency voucher scheme which may be able to be adapted for North Highland and provide a solution. Explore other models of good practice in remote and rural areas to support cash first approaches.</li> <li>Update The Highland Information Trail.</li> <li>Provide information on the maternity section of the NHS Highland website. This will enable the information to be reviewed/updated every quarter.</li> </ul>

### Theme 2: Growing Up - Primary Years

Improvement priority: Mitigate the Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Actions	Priority Actions for 2025/26		
2.1 Increase the uptake of sanitary products in schools and other public sector facilities.	<ul> <li>Increasing reach by encouraging community collection and working with partners to help with delivery of products including social work, homeless teams, Council building receptions</li> <li>Period Poverty team will attend Head Teachers meeting to gather feedback</li> <li>Get feedback from pupils especially about reducing stigma/ embarrassment as project still receiving many online orders from pupils.</li> <li>Explore use of QR codes which pupils can scan and place an order for products which is then sent back to the school in discreet packaging for the pupil to collect.</li> </ul>		
2.2 Roll out cost of the school day toolkit	Increase the number of schools using the toolkit		

### Theme 3: Moving On: Secondary and Young Adulthood

Improvement priority: We will Raise Attainment and Close the Poverty Related Attainment Gap

Actions	Priority Actions for 2025/26		
3.1 Raise awareness of the impact of poverty amongst children and young people	<ul> <li>Improve our shared understanding and use of data</li> <li>Embed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Whole Family Wellbeing Strategic Assessment</li> </ul>		
3.2 Roll out the Family First approach	<ul> <li>Reduce the numbers of children in external residential provision</li> <li>Increase the proportion of children in kinship care</li> <li>Increase the number of foster carers</li> </ul>		

	Increase community services and supports
	<ul> <li>Implement the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme in Highland (see 1.2)</li> </ul>
3.3 Identify way to provided targeted support within universal services.	<ul> <li>Continue to deliver Money Counts courses through NHS Highland Public Health training programme which include promotion of the WAM leaflet and app.</li> <li>Distribute around 1500 IFAN Worrying About Money leaflets in 25/26 to those in need of financial</li> </ul>
	support
	Employability
	<ul> <li>In 2025/26 the target is to work with 300 parents, either on their journey towards employment or for those in-work and in receipt of Universal Credit, to potentially improve their household income through employability support.</li> <li>Employability Child Poverty Co-ordinator in post and will continue working alongside key partners e.g. Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice Scotland, community organisations and employers, to identify and support parents that could benefit from our offers.</li> <li>Increase awareness of available support will continue primarily through the promotion of Work. Life. Highland on-line and in person. Support includes: help with barrier removal, training and skills development, job search and interview skills, volunteering, paid placements in the public and third sectors, self-employment, support for private sector companies to take on employability clients and in-work progression support.</li> <li>The Work. Life. Highland website was launched in autumn 2024 and is providing a simple point of entry for potential clients and employers to access information about the employability support available across Highland. The clear call to action in the site is to get in touch and to date we have seen a significant number of people contacting the service via this route.</li> <li>The Highland Council recently added the role of Employer Engagement Co-ordinator to the Employability team. A key part of the role to date has been to promote flexible working options to employers, including options to help parents enter and remain in the workforce</li> <li>Adult Learning</li> <li>Highland Council Adult Learning service will offer training in the following areas in 2025/26         <ul> <li>Core Skills for Work</li> <li>Money Matters</li> <li>Personal Finance</li> <li>Wellbeing Literacy</li> <li>Family Learning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Appendix - Poverty in Highland

### 1 Child Poverty<sup>2</sup>

In 2022/23, 13,034 children in NHS Highland (Highland and Argyll and Bute) live in poverty after housing costs. 9,776 of these children live in Highland. This means that they live in a household 60% below the UK median income after deducting housing costs.

The average primary school class of 25 pupils in NHS Highland now has around five children living in low-income families. In some of the most deprived areas, this figure is around 12.

Children are much more likely to be exposed to poverty if they live with a lone parent or if they have two or more siblings. Having someone with long-term illness in the household increases the risk due to barriers to employment and caring demands. Ethnic minorities also have higher child poverty rates.

In the past, childhood poverty was related to unemployment. Increasingly, more poor children live with at least one working parent. The current cost of living crisis is pushing more families into poverty. There is a large body of evidence that poverty harms children's health, wellbeing and educational opportunities, impacting the life course.

Rural and island life characteristics are recognised as potential compounders of the main drivers of child poverty. Income from work and earnings can be seasonal and unpredictable, and living costs can be higher with high levels of fuel poverty, higher prices for goods, and unaffordable housing. Lower take-up of welfare support can be an issue in more rural and remote areas.

Scottish policy measures include support through the benefits system, increased childcare provision, school clothing grants, and free school meals and as part of the Workforce 2030 Vision, transforming the role of school nursing specifically to address the impact of inequalities and child poverty. The Scottish Child Payment was introduced in February 2021. The level has risen to £26.70 a week and was extended to children up to 16 years of age in families receiving means-tested benefits. Families can access means-tested support through Best Start Grants.

Currently, 11,975 children in Highland living in low-income families already receiving qualifying benefits receive the Scottish Child Payment.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Information extracted from a report produced by the Health intelligence team: NHS Highland. "Child Poverty: Children and young people's health and wellbeing profiles: supplementary report" Publication date: 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024. Public Health Intelligence, NHS Highland nhsh.publichealthintelligence@nhs.scot

### 2 Local measures of child poverty

### Children in low-income families

0

The terms low income refers to being below the poverty threshold.

The chart shows the percentage of children under 16 living in families either receiving out-of-work (mean-tested) benefits or tax credits, where their reported income is less than 60 percent of the contemporary UK median income. The Scottish Government recommends this measure of relative poverty to monitor child poverty locally.

Other Argyll and Bute Highland — Scotland

Glasgow City (34.8)

North Ayrshire (29.4)

Scotland (21.8)

Highland (19.7)

Argyll and Bute (19.4)

East Renfrewshire (10.4)

Figure 2: Percentage of children in low-income families in Local Authority areas

Source: DWP/HMRC children in low-income families local measure (Relative poverty before housing costs).

2014/15 2015/16 2016/17 2017/18 2018/19 2019/20 2020/21 2021/22 2022/23

Whilst the proportion of children in low-income families fell in 2020/21 this was largely due to the additional £20 a week payment added to social security benefits for a sixmonth period during the pandemic. This uplift stopped in October 2021.

Subsequently, rates have risen again in Highland and Scotland. Slow economic recovery from COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have resulted in rapid and sustained price increases that disproportionately impact low-income families already at risk from food, fuel and transport costs.

Financial year

In 2022/23, 7,355 children under 16 lived in low-income families below the poverty line in Highland.

Number of children 2000 2000 Highland 16-19 2,547 11-15 1.946 5-10 5000 2,737 2,684 2,379 2,192 2,103 1,874 2,088 1,746 2500 1,998 2,152 2 07 2,008 2,012 1,975 1,874 0 2014/15 2015/16 2016/17 2017/18 2018/19 2019/20 2020/21 2021/22 2022/23 Financial year

Figure 3: Number of children in low-income families in Highland

Source: DWP/HMRC children in low-income families local measure (Relative poverty before housing costs)

Figure 4 highlights areas within Highland with high concentrations of children in low-income households. Some caution should be observed when interpreting the data. The focus should be on the overall trend rather than year-on-year change, which is prone to fluctuations in small populations.

Alness - 04 Badenoch and Strathspey South - 02 Caithness South - 03 80 60 40 20 0 Inverness Central, Raigmore and Longman - 01 Inverness Merkinch - 03 Inverness Merkinch - 04 80 60 40 20 Percentage 0 Thurso West - 01 Wick North - 03 Lochaber East and North - 01 80 60 40 20 0 2016 2018 2020 2022 2016 2018 2020 2022 Wick South - 04 80 60 40

Figure 4: Ten small areas in Highland with the highest percentage of children under 16 in low-income households in 2023.

Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 and National Records of Scotland Small Area Population Estimates 2021

Financial year ending

20

2016

2018

2020

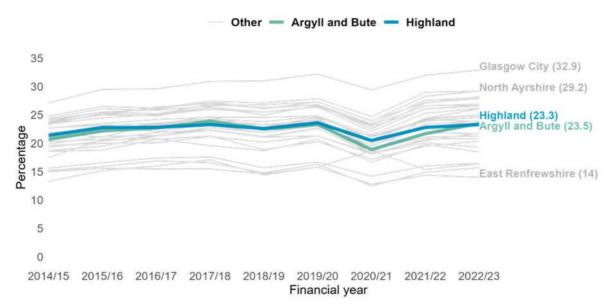
2022

### Child poverty estimates after housing costs

Child poverty after housing costs are reported using data from the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. The data extends the children in low-income families data published by the Dept of Work and Pensions by including modelling for housing costs for Local Authority areas and parliamentary constituencies. Housing is the biggest outgoing for most families. Consequently, the availability of affordable accommodation can have a big impact on poverty numbers.

In 2022/23, 9,776 children in Highland live in poverty after housing costs.

Figure 5: Percentage of children living in poverty after housing costs by Local Authority area in Scotland



Source: End Child Poverty Coalition estimates of child poverty rates after housing costs (2024) 1 A child is defined as aged under 15, or aged 16-19 and in full-time education.

### Working households

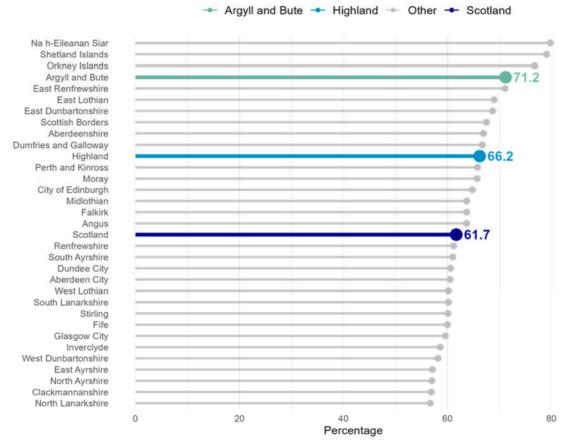
The Department of Work and Pensions data on children in low-income indicates how inwork poverty contributes to overall child poverty in local areas.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of children under 16 in low-income families in a household with at least one adult in work in 2022/23 for the Local Authorities in Scotland. In-work poverty remains more common than out-of-work poverty in all areas.

Six in ten children in poverty live in households where someone is working, and increasingly, only having two parents at work protects against the risk of poverty.

Nearly three-quarters of people experiencing in-work poverty have someone in their family who works in five high-priority industries: hospitality, health and social care, retail, administrative support and manufacturing. Many of these industries are large employers in Highland with a high proportion of part-time workers and seasonal variation in demand.

Figure 6: Percentage of children in poverty before housing costs who are in a household with at least one adult in work by Local Authority area in Scotland in 2022/23.



Source: DWP/HMRC children in low-income families local measure (Relative poverty before housing costs)

### **Priority Groups – poverty and protected characteristics**

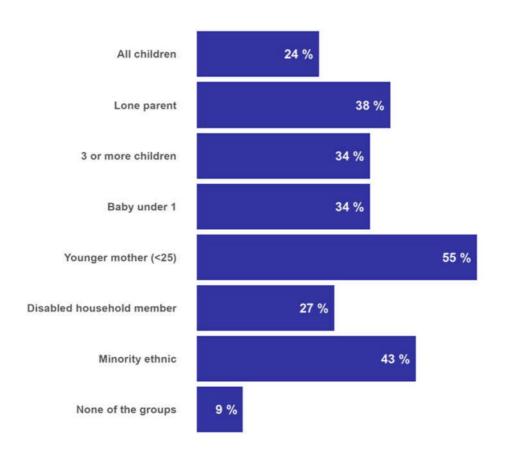
Six groups of priority families are identified as a focus for interventions:

- Lone parent families (majority headed by women)
- Families with a child or adult with a disability
- Larger families with three or more children
- Minority Ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year of age
- Families where the mother is less than 25 years old.

These groupings do not cover all the family types at higher risk of poverty, with nearly one in ten children in poverty living in households with none of these characteristics. There will also be children living in families where these circumstances apply who do not experience poverty.

Figure 7 summarises the estimated proportion of children who live in poverty in these categories in Scotland. Equivalent data for Local Authorities is not available.

Figure 7: Proportion of children in priority groups who are in relative poverty in Scotland



Source: Poverty and Income Inequality Scotland National Statistics Report 2024

Limited data at the local level about the priority groups at risk of experiencing child poverty is routinely produced. Figure 8 summarises numbers who may be at risk from available data, but not all in the categories will be living in poverty.

<sup>1</sup> Estimates are based on data from the DWP Family Resources Survey and use three-year averages\*

<sup>2</sup> All figures are for the period 2020/23, with the exceptions of those reported for younger mothers (2015/18) and families with a baby under one (2017/20)

<sup>\*</sup> Data collection was disrupted during the first year of the pandemic, and the year 2020/21 is excluded from the Scottish Government analysis

Figure 8: Priority family groups in Argyll and Bute and Highland

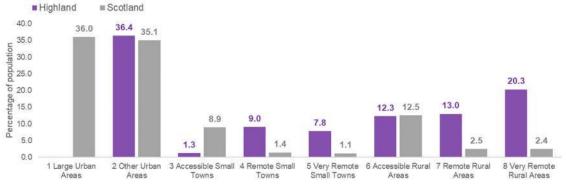
Argull and Ruto	Highland	Scotland
Argyli and bute	підпіапо	Scotland
6,900	16,300	582,300
2,563	7,331	199,583
1,839	5,347	149,029
524	1,425	37,767
708	2,134	58,103
579	1,909	46,959
64	284	6,624
773	2,521	171,509
	2,563 1,839 524 708 579	6,900 16,300 2,563 7,331 1,839 5,347 524 1,425 708 2,134 579 1,909 64 284

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Source: Nomis official census and labour market statistics, Annual population survey 2022.

### 3 Remote and Rural Factors

In Highland, one in three children and young people under 18 years reside in remote rural areas, with one in five living in very remote rural areas. In contrast, one in twenty children lives in remote rural areas in Scotland, with one in forty living in very remote rural areas.

Figure 9: Percentage of the population aged under 18 years of age living in urban and rural areas in Highland and Scotland in 2021



Source: Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020 and NRS Small Area Population Estimates for 2021

Remoteness from services and facilities is an important factor in relation to considering poverty and deprivation in Highland with access challenges compounding

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, Households with dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit, Febuaray 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, Lone parent households with dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit, Febuaray 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, Households with 3 or more dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit, Febuaray 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, Households with dependent children receiving support from Universal Credit with Disabled Child Entitlement and/or Limited Capability for Work Entitlement, Febuaray 2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland, Births 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Source: Ethnic group by age, Scotland's Census 2022. Ethnic minorities including:White: Gypsy/ Traveller, Mixed or multiple ethnic group, Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British: Total, African: Total, Caribbean or Black: Total, Other ethnic groups: Total.

other disadvantages. In remote and rural areas, low incomes of

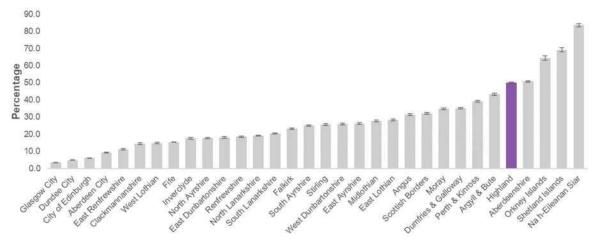
people are exacerbated by additional costs. This includes more expensive food and clothing, more expensive household goods, increased home energy costs and the costs of transport as shown in work on the Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland.<sup>3</sup> This highlights that for people living in rural areas of Scotland, a minimum acceptable standard of living typically requires between a tenth and a third more household spending than in urban parts of the UK.

Evidence from the literature highlights that people living in rural areas experience deprivation differently from those living in towns and cities. Particular issues in rural areas include:

- Less accessible key services including health and social care, childcare and high speed digital networks
- Higher consumption of fuel for heating and transport
- 33% of households in Highland experience fuel poverty (average for Scotland is 24%)<sup>4</sup>
- · Reduced opportunities to earn adequate income
- Higher cost of living impacted by prices to for basic essential supplies
- Limited frequency and coverage of public transport

50% of children and young people in Highland live in the most deprived access quartile according to SIMD. This is amongst the highest levels in Scotland.

Figure 10: Young people living in the most access deprived quintile, aged 00- 25 years in 2020



Source: ScotPHO Community Profiles - SIMD 2016, Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Minimum income standard for Remote Rural Scotland – Policy update 2016, Loughborough University <a href="http://www.hie.co.uk/common/handlers/download-document.ashx?id=90d6c2f6-a461-4ff8-9902-49f073765e39">http://www.hie.co.uk/common/handlers/download-document.ashx?id=90d6c2f6-a461-4ff8-9902-49f073765e39</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-islands-data-overview-2023/pages/9/

In 2022, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Rural College published *Improving* our understanding of child poverty in rural and island Scotland.<sup>5</sup> It identified that interventions to tackle child poverty in rural and island locations should:

- recognise higher costs of living and of service delivery in these locations
- ensure early intervention and a long-term approach
- place children and families at the centre of the intervention
- explore digital approaches as a delivery mechanism, where appropriate
- involve schools as key partners
- ensure all interventions are rural and island proofed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-understanding-child-poverty-rural-island- scotland/

# **Equality Impact Assessment Template: Please complete alongside the guidance document**

Title of work:	Date of completion:	Completed by:
Highland Local Child Poverty Action	19/08/25	Lynda Thomson
Update Report April 2024 – March 2025		Senior Health Improvement Specialist
		Health Improvement Team

# **Description of work:**

The development of The Highland Child Poverty Action Update report is a duty placed on both Highland Council and NHS Highland to jointly develop annual updates which outline the activity that has taken place in the previous year and the actions proposed to be taken in the following year which will address child poverty.

The Highland update Plan is set around the agreed themes and life stages of children and young people identified by the Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023 – 2026.

### Outcome of work:

To address the key drivers of poverty which include Income from employment, costs of living and income from social security and benefits in kind.

The overarching outcomes identified for priority action in 2025/26 include:

We will reduce financial barriers in order to increase participation, raise aspirations and address the impacts of poverty Mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis

We will raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap.

# Who will be impacted?

Stakeholders: (who will this work affect?)

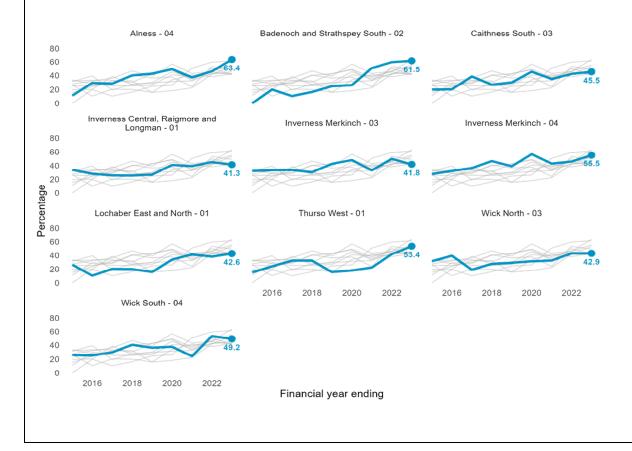
This work will impact on children and young people and their families; it is specifically aimed at those children living in poverty and those who are most vulnerable.

This work will also involve partnership working across public sector including NHS Highland and Highland Council, but will also involve actions by third sector and community groups as well as partners represented on the Highland Reducing Poverty Group.

# How do you know:

Around 24% of children in Scotland are likely to experience poverty. In Highland this figure is just above 23% after housing costs are included.

Work by the Public Health Intelligence team has identified ten small areas in Highland with the highest percentage of children under 16 in low income households in 2023.



In-work poverty remains more common than out-of-work poverty in all areas. Nearly three-quarters of people experiencing inwork poverty have someone in their family who works in five high-priority industries including hospitality, health and social care, retail, administrative support and manufacturing. Many of these industries are large employers in Highland with a high proportion of part-time workers and seasonal variation in demand.

The Scottish Government identifies 6 priority groups who are most likely to be in poverty including:

- Lone Parent Families (38%)
- Minority Ethnic Families (43%)
- Families with a disabled child or adult (27%)
- Families with a younger mum (55%)
- Families with a child under 1 (34%)
- Larger families (3 or more children) (34%)

The percentage of all children in poverty is 24%.

In Highland one in three children and young people under 18 years live in remote rural areas. Remoteness from services and facilities is an important factor in relation to considering poverty and deprivation in Highland. In remote and rural areas, low incomes are exacerbated by additional costs of living in the area.

What will the impact of this work be? (see appendix 1 for list of protected characteristics and other groups that you may wish to identify)

**Sex**: Poverty and Child poverty specifically is most often experienced by women. Actions taken to tackle child poverty will therefore have a positive impact for women living in poverty. We should however, be mindful, that men with children can also be impacted by poverty and therefore should seek to ensure any actions take consideration of households where men are either lone parents or within families with children or that by targeting women we do not negatively impact on households with men.

**Age:** The Child Poverty Act is aimed at specifically children and young people up to the age of 18. The actions will therefore have a positive impact for this age group as well as families with young children. Specific priority should be given to families where there is a young mother, under the age of 25 and for children under the age of 1. Care should be taken to ensure that our proposed actions are aimed at this younger age group when targeting.

**Disability:** 27% of households with a disabled child or adult live in poverty and it is one of the identified 6 priority groups. Actions should be assessed as to whether targeting is taking place for these particular households and where needed more focus given to these households including capturing lived experience where appropriate.

Religion or belief: No identified impact

**Race:** 43% of Minority Ethnic Families live in poverty. In Highland there are fewer minority ethnic families living in communities which may result in the needs of these families being hidden. Where universal approaches are made it is important to collect data which might allow us to monitor whether minority ethnic families are supporting to engage with activities or to gain from interventions.

Sexual orientation: No identified impact

Gender reassignment: No identified impact

**Pregnancy/Maternity:** Actions taken within the child poverty report will have a positive impact for women who are pregnant or following the birth of a baby for those families in poverty. Actions taken at the earliest stage are more likely to support tackling child poverty and are therefore an important part of actions identified, however, we do not want to lose sight of families whose children are older and are living in poverty and therefore consideration is given within this plan to actions that can be taken across the life-stages of children and young people.

Marriage and Civil Partnership: No identified impact

# Other Key identified Groups:

**Unemployed:** Actions taken within the plan will have a positive impact on those who are unemployed, however, it is noted that for many families living in poverty there is an adult in the household in employment so planned actions also need to ensure that these households are supported around income maximisation and cost of living support.

**Lone Parent Families:** 38% of lone parent families live in poverty across Scotland, we therefore need to ensure that actions taken are identifying and targeting these groups and ensuring that we consider barriers such as child care and others that might

present specific difficulties for lone parents in accessing services. It will be important to work alongside organisations that support lone parents to ensure that we are targeting our actions accordingly.

Those living in remote and rural areas or island communities: We know that for families and children living in remote and rural communities across Highland there are additional challenges both for cost of living which is higher for those communities but also in access to services and support where available. It will be important to consider the needs of those living in poverty who live in remote rural communities and are often more hidden as a result. We need to also ensure that any actions taken have considered ways in which services can be delivered in order to ensure access from a Highland population.

**Fairer Scotland Duties:** This plan is aimed at those in the lowest socio-economic groups and will therefore have a positive impact for those who live in poverty.

# Given all of the above what actions, if any, do you plan to take?

- 1. Discussions will take place about specific actions that may be required to consider the needs of the 10 identified small areas in Highland with the highest percentage of children under 16 in low income households.
- 2. Discussions will also take place about a consideration of any targeted interventions or partnership work that might be considered to specifically explore the needs of employees with families that work within identified industries where in-work poverty is more prevalent including hospitality, health and social care, retail, administrative support and manufacturing.
- 3. Discussions will take place about tracking where interventions are having most impact specifically in terms of identified priority groups but also in terms of geographical spread.
- 4. We will seek to work alongside organisations or community groups that work with identified priority groups e.g lone parents.
- 5. We will seek to include the voice and participation of young people and children in ongoing actions.

What is the impact of this policy/service development on infants, children and young people? (The <u>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</u> places a compatibility duty on public authorities including NHS Highland to ensure the rights of children are protected and promoted in all areas of their life).

Please view the EQIA Children's Rights Flowchart and Guidance (see below). To ascertain whether completion of the EQIA Children's Rights Questions is required, first complete the Screening Sheet.

For more information or support contact: NHSH Child Health Commissioner: deborah.stewart2@nhs.scot

**EQIA Children's Rights Questions** – Please first complete the Children's Rights Screening Sheet to ascertain if completing the EQIA Children's Rights Questions below is required.

What impact will your policy/service change have on Children's Rights? Will the impact of your policy/service development on Children's Rights be Negative/Positive/Neutral? What articles of the UNCRC does the policy/service development impact on? Will there be different impacts on different groups of children and young people e.g. preschool children; children in hospital; children with additional support needs; care experienced children; children living in poverty?

The actions identified in the updated report are aimed at targeting children living in poverty. The actions will have a positive impact on children in this respect. It may impact on any of the articles of UNCRC but specifically the aim is to have a positive impact on article 27 (adequate standard of living). There are identified priority groups that we know are more at risk of experiencing poverty as already highlighted and we will seek to ensure that we are identifying targeted interventions that will meet the needs of those most vulnerable.

If a **negative impact is assessed** for any area of rights or any group of children and young people, can you explain why this is necessary and proportionate? What options have you considered to modify the proposal, or mitigate the impact?

There are no specific negative impacts assessed.

In what ways have you taken the views of children and young people in to consideration in the development of this policy/service change? What evidence have you used or gathered on children's views? How will you monitor the impact of the policy / service change and communicate this to children?

The views of children and young people have been collected through a variety of means including Cost of the School Day Voice Network which involved a number of primary schools in the area and Inverness High School. A survey was also undertaken in 2023 with 3,608

responses from young people which is completed by pupils in P7, S2 and S4 annually. The survey responses help to set ongoing measures of progress made in schools to support young people against key identified issues. Planet Youth have worked with five Highland secondary schools to develop an approach to tackling teen smoking and drug use. Young people are involved in the development of identified key actions which can help including a survey completed by 348 S4 pupils from the identified schools.

How will the policy / service change give better or further effect to the implementation of Children's Rights in NHS Highland?

The update report and identified actions will support the implementation of Children's Rights in NHS Highland.

Approved by: Cathy Steer. Head of Health Improvement.

### **EQIA Children's Rights – Guidance Notes**

### EQIA Children's Rights – Flowchart

### **Screening Sheet**

General description of the policy/service development and its aims, supplemented by an initial assessment of the applicability of the policy/service development to children and young people in NHS Highland.

Asks you to consider:

- What aspects will affect children and young people up to 18
- What the likely impact will be
- Which groups of children and young people will be most affected
- Will this require completion of the EQIA Children's Rights questions



Completion of EQIA Children's Rights Questions **NOT Required.** Explain your reasons.

Sign the EQIA Children's Rights Screening Sheet and return to:



Completion of the EQIA Children's Rights Questions **IS Required** Sign the EQIA Children's Rights Screening Sheet and return to:

Continue to next stage.



### **EQIA Children's Rights Questions - Completion**

Asks you to set out:

What impact will your policy/service change have on Children's Rights? Will there be different impacts on different groups of children and young people e.g. preschool children; children in hospital; children with additional support needs; care experienced children; children living in poverty?

If a **negative impact is assessed** for any area of rights or any group of children and young people, can you explain why this is necessary and proportionate? What options have you considered to modify the proposal, or mitigate the impact?

In what ways have you taken the views of children and young people in to consideration in the development of this policy/service change? What evidence have you used or gathered on children's views? How will you monitor the impact of the policy / service change and communicate this to children?

How will the policy / service change give better or further effect to the implementation of Children's Rights in NHS Highland?



### **EQIA Children's Rights Questions Complete**

Person Leading the Policy/Service Development and Line Manager (include Email) sign, date and return to:

Please consider publishing a child-friendly version.

# **EQIA Children's Rights – Screening Sheet**

The <u>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</u> places a compatibility duty on NHS Highland to ensure the rights of children are protected and promoted in all areas of their life. Completing this Screening Sheet will indicate if completing the **EQIA Children's Rights Questions** is required.

Please note that the actions, or inactions, of public authorities such as NHS Highland can impact children more strongly than any other group in society and every area of policy/service development affects children to some degree, whether directly or indirectly.

For information or support contact: NHSH Child Health Commissioner: deborah.stewart2@nhs.sc

### Overview

Completing the Children's Rights Screening Sheet is a preliminary check on the proposed policy/service development to help determine whether completing the Children's Rights questions in the EQIA is required, and provide a record of that decision.

The Children's Rights screening questions below; ask basic information about the policy/service development and how it will affect children and young people specifically.

Decisions about whether or not to complete the Children's Rights Screening questions as part of the EQIA should take place as early as possible in the formation of the policy/service development.

This is the best way of ensuring that children's rights and wellbeing influence the way in which the policy develops, and that NHS Highland duties to act in a manner compatible with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 are met.

Who takes part in the Screening exercise depends on the complexity and potential reach of the policy/service development under consideration.

# 1. What aspects of the policy/service development will affect children and young people up to the age of 18?

The Articles of the UNCRC apply to all children and young people up to the age of 18, including non-citizen and undocumented children and young people.

The actions identified in the updated report are aimed at targeting children living in poverty. The actions will have a positive impact on children in this respect. It may impact on any of the articles of UNCRC but specifically the aim is to have a positive impact on article 27 (adequate standard of living). There are identified priority groups that we know are more at risk of experiencing poverty as already highlighted and we will seek to ensure that we are identifying targeted interventions that will meet the needs of those most vulnerable.

# 2. What likely impact – direct or indirect – will the policy/service development have on children and young people?

'Direct' impact refers to policies/service developments where children and young people are directly affected by the proposed changes, e.g. in early years, education, child protection or looked after children in care). 'Indirect' impact refers to policies/service developments that are not directly aimed at children but will have an impact on them. Examples include: hospital visiting policy, treatment/support to parents, staff parental leave, access to play areas, transport schemes.

We anticipate direct positive impacts from the implementation and delivery of the identified actions in the report to tackle child poverty.

# 3. Which groups of children and young people will be affected?

Under the UNCRC, 'children' can refer to: individual children, groups of children, or children in general. Some groups of children will relate to the groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. 'Groups' can also refer to children by age band or setting, or those who are eligible for special protection or assistance: e.g. preschool children, children in hospital, care experienced children and young people, children in rural areas, young people who offend, victims of abuse or exploitation, child migrants, or children living in poverty.

We identify from the research and data as well as the guidance from Scottish Government that there are identified communities and groups of children and families that are most at risk of living in poverty. These are the groups that we plan to target in tackling child poverty in Highland.

# 4. Is completion of the EQIA Children's Rights Questions required?

Please state if completion of the Children's Rights Questions in the EQIA template will be carried out or not. Please explain your reasons.

No – there is some work that we need to develop as identified in the Equality impact assessment under recommendations, but there are no direct negative impacts that have been identified as part of this process and therefore no need for a full EQIA to be completed.

# 5. Sign, Date and Authorise

Person Leading the Policy/Service Development:

Email: Lynda.thomson1@nhs.scot

Signature & Date of Sign Off: Lynda Thomson 19/08/25

Line Manager: Cathy Steer Email: cathy.steer@nhs.scot

Signature & Date of Sign Off:

Cathy Steer 19/08/25

### **Guidance - Screening Sheet**

Completing the Children's Rights Screening Sheet is a preliminary check on the proposed policy/service change to help determine whether completing the Children's Rights questions in the EQIA is required, and provide a record of that decision.

The Children's Rights Screening Sheet asks basic information about the policy/service change and how it will affect children and young people specifically.

Completion of the Children's Rights Screening Sheet as part of the EQIA should take place as early as possible in the formation of the policy/service change.

This is the best way of ensuring that children's rights and wellbeing influence the way in which the policy develops, and that NHS Highland duties to act in a manner compatible with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 are met.

Who takes part in the Screening exercise depends on the complexity and potential reach of the policy/service change under consideration. Completion of the Screening Sheet will enable you to decide if completing the EQIA Children's Rights questions is required. The impact assessment process is designed to be proportionate - not every proposed policy/service change will affect children and young people and therefore not automatically require completion of the EQIA Children's Rights questions beyond the Screening stage.

### **Guidance on Completion of the EQIA Children's Rights Questions**

When undertaking the EQIA, you must keep under consideration whether there are any steps which could be taken which would or might secure better or further effect of the UNCRC requirements, and if it is considered appropriate to do so, take any of the steps identified by that consideration.

There are two key considerations when completing the EQIA Children's Rights questions:

**Participation:** The UNCRC gives children the right to participate in decisions which affect them. When assessing the impacts of the policy/service development, you are recommended to consult with children and young people. You can do this directly, through organisations that represent children and young people or through using existing evidence on the views and experiences of children where relevant. Participation of children and young people should be meaningful and accessible.

**Evidence:** You are recommended to gather evidence when assessing the impact of the policy/service development on children's rights and also for measuring and evaluating the policy/service development.

The EQIA Children's Rights questions to be completed with guidance on what to consider are:

What impact will your policy/service change have on Children's Rights? Will the impact of your policy/service development on Children's Rights be Negative/Positive/Neutral? What articles of the UNCRC does the policy/service development impact on? Will there be different impacts on different groups of

children and young people e.g. preschool children; children in hospital; children with additional support needs; care experienced children; children living in poverty?

### Considerations

### Will the impact of your policy/service development on Children's Rights be Negative/Positive/Neutral?

**Negative** impact i) The policy/service development may impede or actually reverse the enjoyment of existing rights, requiring mitigating measures be put in place; ii) The policy/service development fails to comply with UNCRC and other human rights obligations, requiring modification of the proposal; iii) The policy/service development may have a detrimental impact on children, so should be withdrawn and alternatives presented.

**Positive** impact i) The policy/service development complies with UNCRC requirements; ii) The policy/service development makes changes inline with the UNCRC iii) The policy/service development has the potential to advance the realisation of children's rights.

Neutral impact i) The policy/service development brings no discernible lessening of or progress in children's rights or their wellbeing.

### What articles of the UNCRC does the policy/service development impact on?

List all relevant articles of the UNCRC. While all articles of the UNCRC are given equal weight and are seen as complementing each other, the four general principles of the UNCRC; non-discrimination (article 2); the best interests of the child (article 3); the right to life, survival and development (article 6); and the child's right to have their views given due weight (article 12) underpin all other rights in the Convention, and should always be considered in your assessment. Refer to the <a href="UNCRC">UNCRC</a> summary for an overview of UNCRC articles. The most likely articles for consideration are the articles listed above plus; the right to health and health services (article 24). More detailed information on each article can be accessed at: <a href="https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text">https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text</a>

# Will there be different impacts on different groups of children and young people?

Consideration of which groups of children will be affected by the policy/service development is required, along with any competing interests between different groups of children and young people, or between children and young people and other groups. Under the UNCRC, 'children' can refer to: individual children, groups of children, or children in general. Some groups of children will relate to the groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. 'Groups' can also refer to children by age band or setting, or those who are eligible for special protection or assistance: e.g. preschool children, children in hospital, care experienced children and young people, children in rural areas, young people who offend, victims of abuse or exploitation, child migrants, or children living in poverty.

If a negative impact is assessed for any area of rights or any group of children and young people, can you explain why this is necessary and proportionate? What options have you considered to modify the proposal, or mitigate the impact?

### Considerations

Give careful thought to whether any negative impacts are necessary and proportionate when weighed against the purpose of the policy/service development. For example, are you clear that the public benefits demonstrably outweigh the negative impacts and that your proposals are both justified by evidence, and have the least possible impact on the enjoyment of the Children's Rights in question? Again, you are required to provide evidence, and where possible to have consulted with those groups and communities most likely to be affected. If the assessment indicates a negative impact, you must present options for modification or mitigation of the original proposals. Options should be proportionate, refer to any potential resource implications associated with the change in policy/service development, and indicate how the proposed change(s) will result in a positive impact on Children's Rights.

In what ways have you taken the views of children and young people in to consideration in the development of this policy/service change? What evidence have you used or gathered on children's views? How will you monitor the impact of the policy / service change and communicate this to children?

### Considerations

As part of the EQIA Children's Rights process, you should ensure that children and young people's views and experiences are sourced, included and recorded, and make it clear how these views have informed the Children's Rights analysis, and conclusions. Participatory policy-making is at the heart of human rights frameworks. Anyone who will be affected by the policy/service development should be given the opportunity to contribute their views. This includes children and young people, their parents/carers, organisations which work with them. where children and young people's views are not known on a matter that is likely to have an impact on them, steps should be taken to obtain their views. Consultation with children and young people can take place using one or more of the following methods:

### Consultations

- Adding specific questions aimed at children and young people to a broader public consultation;
- Targeted promotion of public consultations to children and young people through relevant websites, schools/colleges, social media ensuring that consultation materials are written in a style that is accessible to and suitable for children;
- Making use of existing consultation mechanisms through rights, participation and youth work organisations/structures (including, e.g. local young person-led organisations):
- Setting up/commissioning public consultations with children and young people to gather their views on the proposed measure
- Targeted consultations with the specific groups of children and young people who will be affected by the proposed measure, e.g. children in care, traveller children and families, children affected by domestic violence, children in hospital, children accessing NHS Highland services.

# Where direct consultation is not possible, consider the following:

- Relevant published research that involved and collected the views of children and young people;
- A re-analysis of children and young people's responses to a recent consultation that is relevant to this policy/service development area;

- Sending out a 'call for evidence' to service providers to ask them for any unpublished or difficult-to-locate information they have collected on the views and experiences of the children and young people who use them;
- Asking organisations which work with or on behalf of children and young people to submit the views of those they work with this is particularly useful to identify case study information, or the experiences of groups of children and young people living in particular circumstances;
- Looking at inspection reports that reflect the views of children and young people.

However, existing evidence may need to be supplemented. Where there is insufficient, contradictory or only anecdotal evidence, you will have to decide whether you are able to make a well-informed assessment of the potential impact on Children's Rights without commissioning further research and/or consulting with children and young people, and other stakeholder groups, to fill that evidence gap. The reasoning behind your decision should be recorded in the EQIA. If a consultation or the opportunity to work more collaboratively with children and young people are not possible at this stage additional efforts should be made to ensure children and young people are involved at a later date as part of the monitoring and review of the policy/measure.

### National and local resources are available to support engagement with children and young people:

National Resource: Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making

Local Resource: Insert link to the Highland Children and Young People Participation Strategy, once available.

Local Resource: NHS Highland Engagement Framework 2022 - 2025 Local Resource: Insert THC Children's rights website, once available.

Training and awareness raising resources on <u>Children's Rights (UNCRC)</u> is available via Turas. Please note that you must be signed in to your Turas account to view and access the eLearning modules.

### How will the policy / service change give better or further effect to the implementation of Children's Rights in NHS Highland?

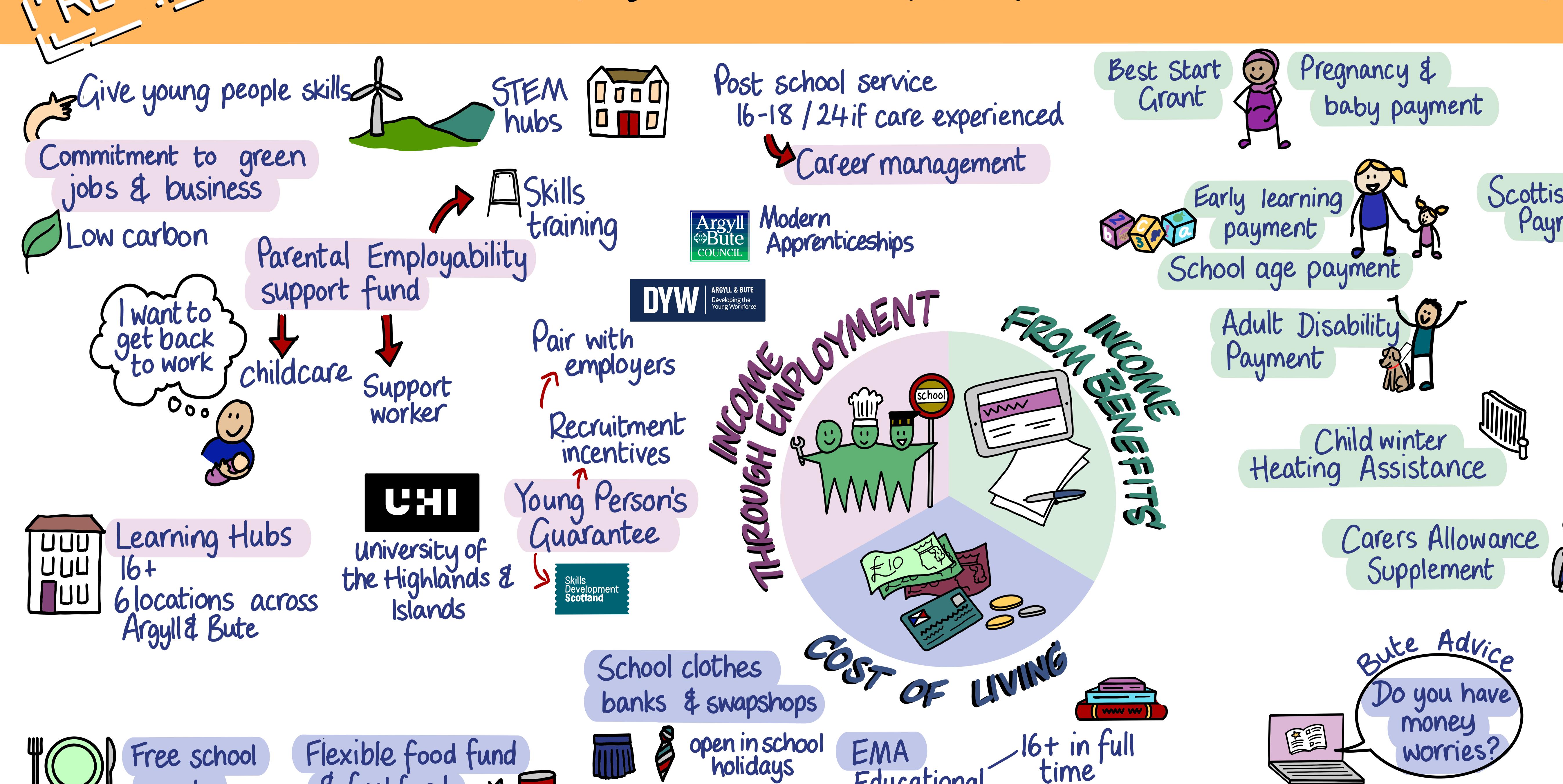
### Considerations

Your assessment may reveal that the policy/service development not only complies with the articles of the UNCRC but takes things further and helps progress the realisation of children's rights in Highland; i.e. gives better or further effect to the UNCRC. Completing the EQIA Children's Rights questions can provide a means to record that policy development.

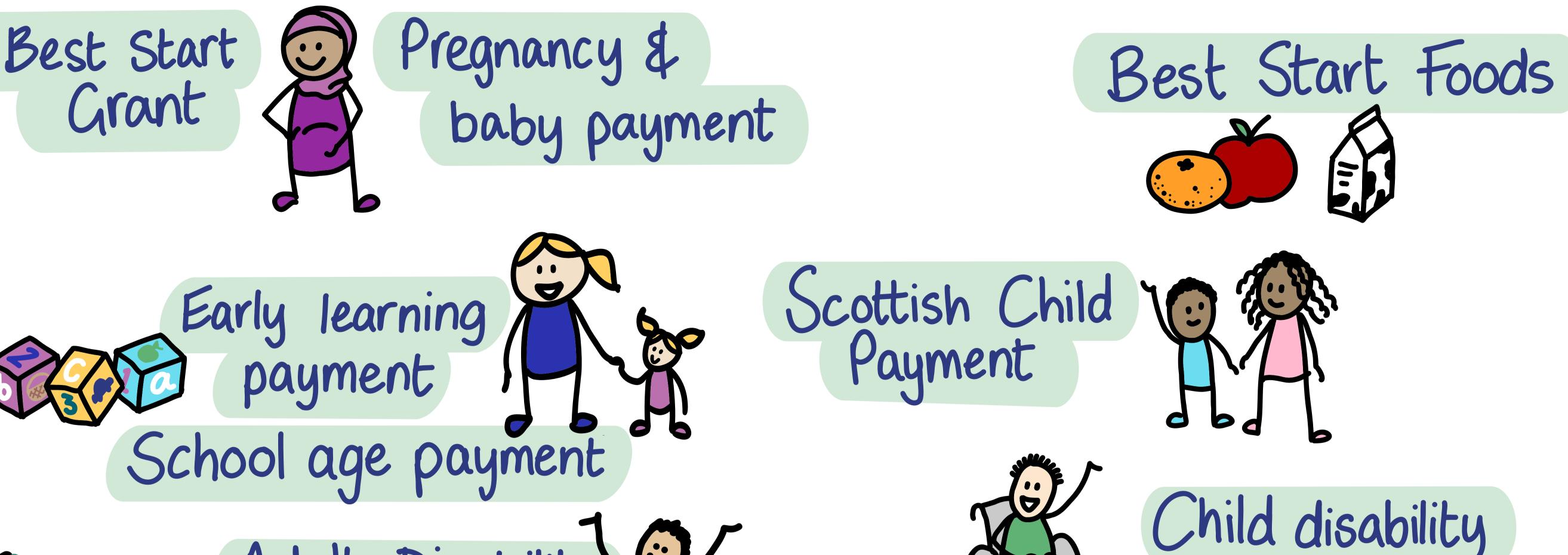
All the information you provide on the EQIA Children's Rights screening sheet and EQIA Children's Rights questions will inform a report by NHS Highland to the Scottish Government that is required by law every 3 years.

For further information and support contact NHSH Child Health Commissioner@deborah.stewart2@nhs.scot or visit the Children's Rights section of the NHSH Intranet.	





Period Products

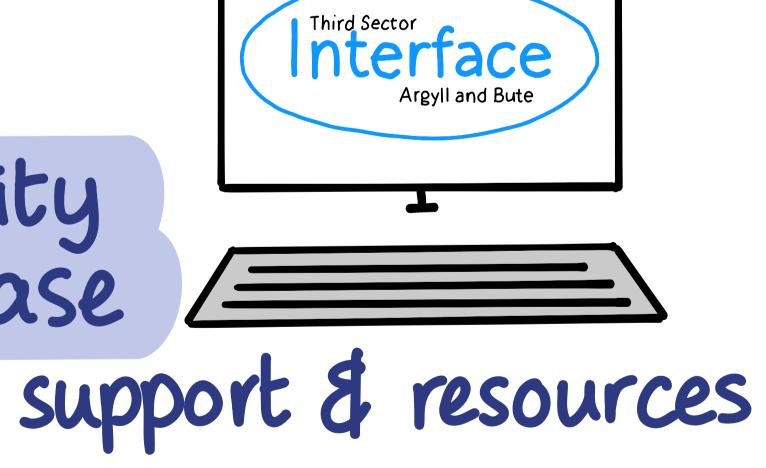












Support young carers Community activities database holidays Carers Centres & MAYDS /paperwork Rights respecting

Training

housing

Peer support



TACKLINGTHE IMPACTS OF POVERTY

meals

you will be eligible

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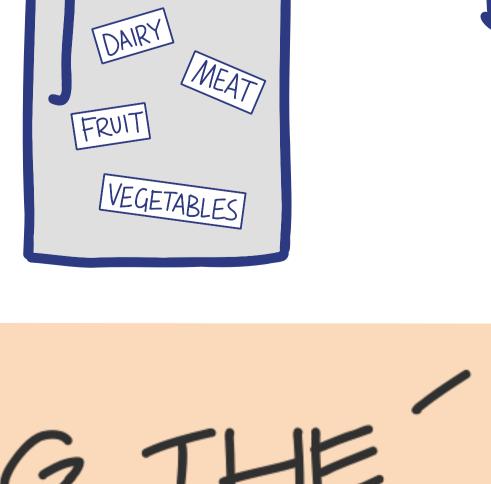
for other benefits

Community

food forum

fridge

Community



Community

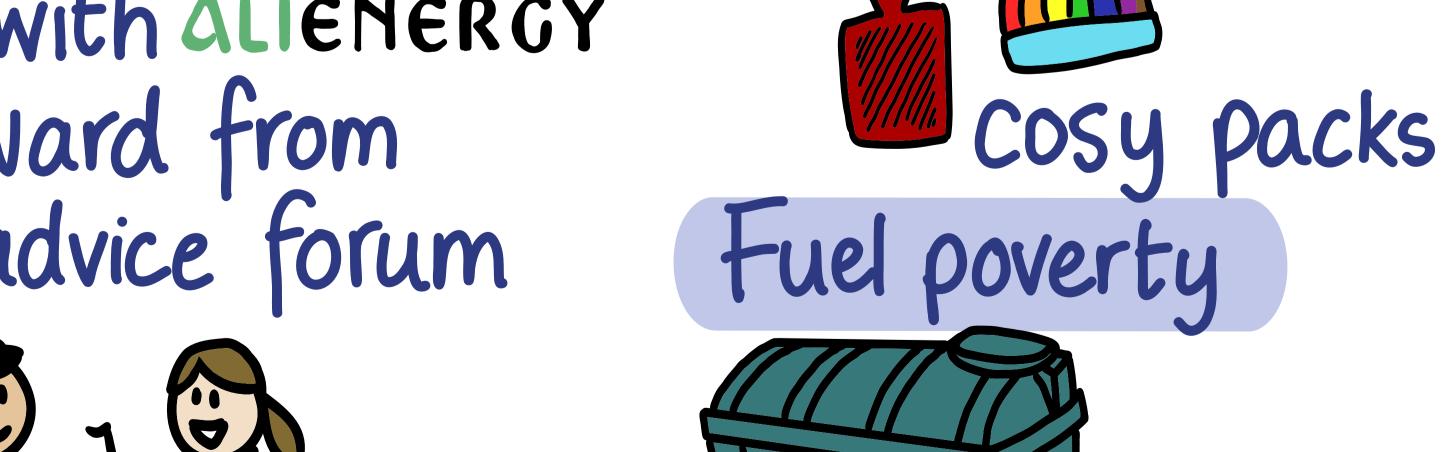
4 fuel fund

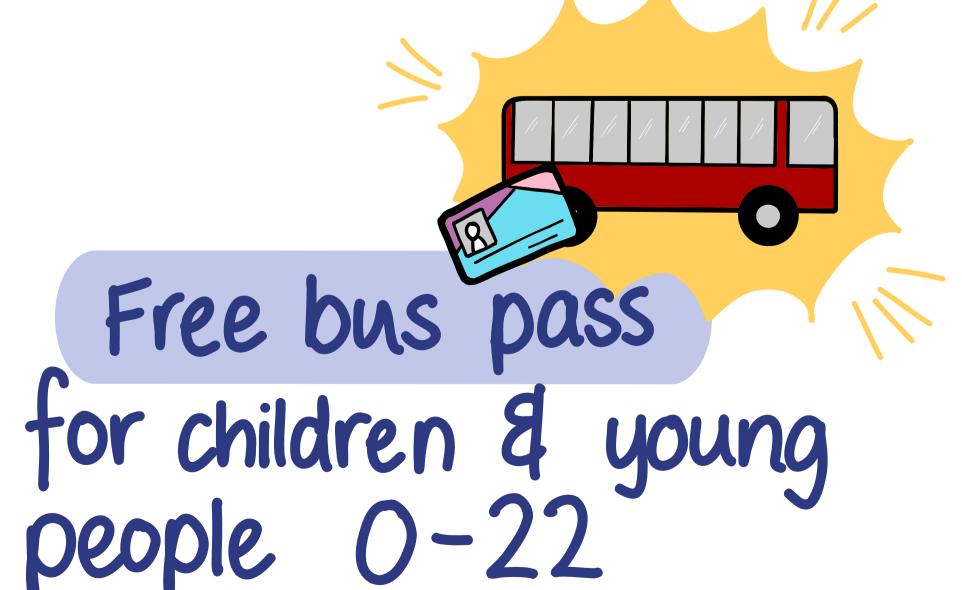
Crisis grant Advice 4 meet with ALIENERGY 2nd award from Bute advice forum

= Island poverty=

4-Fuel poverty

1-Island premium





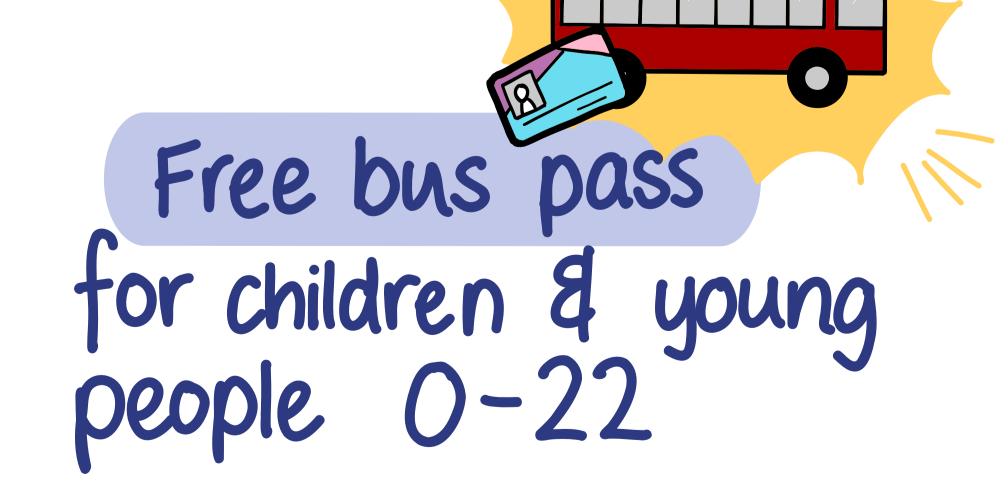
education

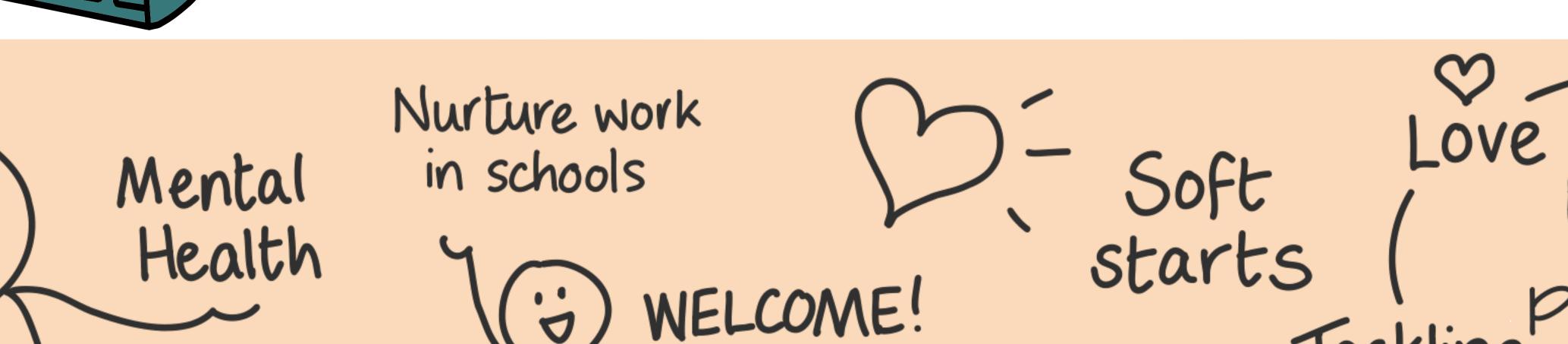
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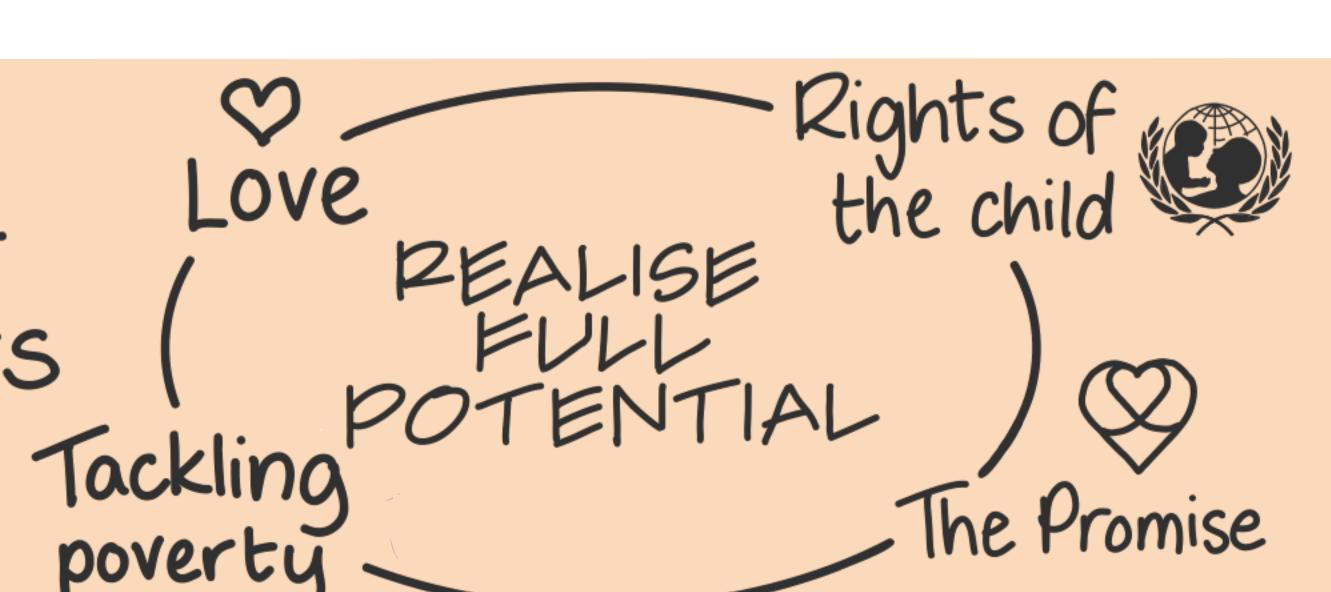
Educational

Maintenance

Allowance



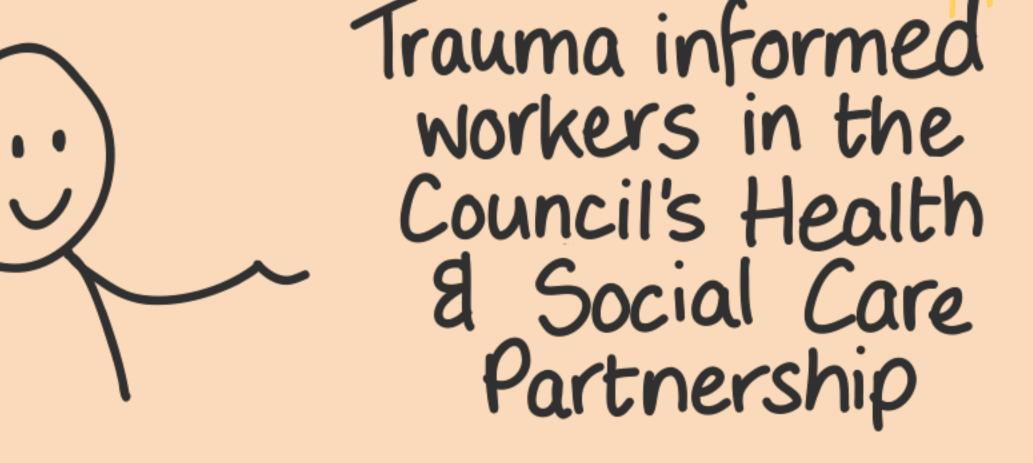




schools

PLANE

South





# **Argyll and Bute Child Poverty**

**Action Plan Review** 

2024

2025







# **Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2024 – 2025**

# Contents

Argyll aı	nd Bute Child Poverty	
Argyll	and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2024 – 2025	2
Forev	ord	3
Introd	uction	5
Child	Friendly Version of the Plan	8
Integr	ated Impact Assessments	8
Data	and Child Poverty	g
Taking Action on Rural Poverty (TARP)		10
Child	Poverty and Mental Health	12
The P	romise and Whole Family Support	18
United	Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	20
The F	lan	21
A.	Increasing income From Employment and Earning	21
B.	Increasing income Through Benefits	39
C.	The Cost of Living	45
D.	Helping Families in Other Ways	56
E.	Other Planned Work	62
F.	References	63

### **Foreword**

The Scottish Government has clearly stated its intention to tackle child poverty. On 22 May 2024, the First Minister, John Swinney MSP, set out the priorities that would underpin the work of the Scottish Government and reaffirmed its commitment to address child poverty, saying.

My first priority is to eradicate child poverty—not tackle or reduce child poverty but eradicate it. That will be the single most important objective of my Government and my Cabinet, because child poverty stunts the progress of any nation, and it stands in the way of social justice and economic growth. My Cabinet will do everything in our power—including listening to and working with members across the chamber—to achieve our aim.

Despite actions taken both nationally and locally in Scotland, we know that we have not yet delivered on this ambition. 2023 - 2024 figures were released in June 2025, by the End Child Poverty (ECP) coalition. The annual analysis by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University looks at local poverty rates after housing costs, which is seen as a more accurate assessment of disposable family income. The constituency Argyll and Bute and South Lochaber, shows a rate of 22.1%; the previous year was 23.5% so a small reduction can be seen. For the same period the Scottish rate of relative child poverty was 23%.

Danny Dorling in his Book "Seven Children; Inequality and Britain's Next Generation" 2024, noted that:

In the seven most recent years surveyed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2014 – 2021, child poverty has risen faster in the UK than in any comparable country worldwide. (1)

In Argyll and Bute, we acknowledge these barriers to lifting children out of poverty. For us, they are added to others more specific to our area, including the cost of living in our remote, rural and island places, the cost and challenges of travel, housing shortages, wages lower than the national average and the need to address employment opportunities.

Despite all of this, the task of combatting child poverty remains a top priority and is coordinated by our Child Poverty Action Group and the Financial Advice and Inclusion Group. These groups, with leadership across the HSCP, Council and NHS Highland, bring together, departments, organisations and partners to tackle child poverty.

In all of this we listen to the voices of our communities and children and young people. We work with them to ensure their rights are respected. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 makes these clear including the right to food, a decent standard of living and a safe home (article 27); the best interests of the child to be paramount in all actions affecting them (article 3) and the right to be heard (article 12).

We want to take this opportunity to thank the staff across our respective organisations, and also our partners across the statutory, independent and third sectors for their tireless work in tackling child poverty. That partnership is key. Finally, we want to thank the people of Argyll and Bute, without whose support for each other no progress would be possible.

### 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.



Evan Beswick Chief Officer

Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership and Chair Child Poverty Action Group





Pippa Milne
Chief Executive
Argyll and Bute Council



Fiona Davies
Chief Executive
NHS Highland



### Introduction

In 2017 the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act came into force as an attempt to put in place measures that would reduce the concerning increase in child poverty, both on a national and local level. The 2017 Act set four targets, which the Scottish Government committed to achieving by 2024 - 2025 and 2030; these are all measured after housing costs are deducted.

The targets for 2024 - 25:

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

# Targets for 2030:

- 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).

However, despite good intentions and efforts both locally and nationally, child poverty is still very much with us, albeit at a significantly lower rate than England and Wales.

Annual statistics published today show that compared with the previous year's statistics, relative child poverty in 2023-24 reduced from 26% to 22% in Scotland while absolute child poverty fell from 23% to 17%. UK Poverty statistics published today show levels of relative child poverty at 31% and absolute child poverty at 26%.

Scottish Government, 27/03/2025

### Child poverty in Scotland falls - gov.scot

Child poverty rates in Scotland (24%) remain much lower than those in England (30%) and Wales (29%) and are similar (if slightly higher) than in Northern Ireland (23%). This is likely to be due, at least in part, to the Scottish Child Payment. This highlights the effect benefits can have in reducing poverty. (2)

UK Poverty 2025 The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

This picture is reflected in 2023 – 2024 figures released in June 2025, by the End Child Poverty (ECP) coalition. The annual analysis by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University looks at local poverty rates after housing costs, which is seen as a more accurate assessment of disposable family income. The constituency Argyll and Bute and South Lochaber, shows a rate of 22.1%; the previous year was 23.5% so a small reduction can be seen. Figures for Scotland also show improvement and reflect the impact of the Scottish Child Payment and mitigation of the two-child cap.

A chart showing percentages of constituencies where at least 31% of children are in poverty across the UK in 2023 to 2024. Scotland has the lowest rate at 7%, the highest at 73% is the Northwest of England.

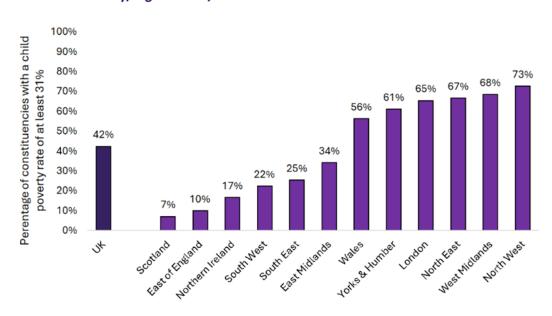


Figure 3 Percentage of constituencies where at least 31% of children are in poverty, by country/region: 2023/24

Source: End Child Poverty estimates of local child poverty rates, AHC (2025)

Research tells us that certain groups are overrepresented in terms of child poverty, these include:

- three or more children in the household.
- Households with a disabled member.
- Households with children under the age of 1.
- Minority ethnic households.
- Single parent households.

Households where the mother is under the age of 25.

Where one or more of these factors exist within a household, the probability of child poverty being present increases. However, these groupings do not cover all the family types at higher risk of poverty, with nearly one in ten children in poverty living in households with none of these characteristics. As well, not all families in these groups live in poverty.

Geographical factors are also important when looking at child poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation point out commonalties that connect rural areas:

The main drivers of poverty vary across different geographies – a greater reliance on renting and higher costs of housing are substantial drivers in larger cities in particular, while lower rates of employment, with fewer employment opportunities alongside a greater concentration of employment in lower paid roles and sectors, are more significant drivers of poverty across many post-industrial and coastal areas. (3)

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) UK Poverty 2025

Rurality is an important factor and one which is key to tackling child poverty in Argyll and Bute. A research Project commissioned by the Scottish Government and carried out by Loughborough University, found that, because of specific additional costs, it is more expensive to reach a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in remote rural Scotland, than in other more urban areas. For remote rural areas, in 2023, this "uplift" figure was 14%, as it was for island places. (4)

Dr Jayne Glass looked at existing research and data and asked the question, where were the knowledge gaps? Dr Glass gave an overview of the factors that can make living in poverty, and addressing child poverty, particularly challenging in remote, rural and island locations. (5)

- Income from work and earnings.
- Volatile and unpredictable rural incomes.
- Limited access to training and skills development.
- Reliance on private vehicles.
- Lack of local and flexible childcare.
- Rural gender pay gap.
- · Costs of living.
- Higher levels of fuel poverty in remote rural and island areas.
- Additional minimum living costs in remote rural and island areas (add 15-30%).
- Unaffordable housing and/or poor housing condition.

The importance of employability factors in rural areas is clear. In Argyll and Bute, the percentage of people employed in low pay sectors in 2023 was 33.3% as opposed to the Scottish average of 28.8% (Annual Population Survey 2023). When looking at earnings for that residence based and working full time, in Argyll and Bute, 2024, for male workers, it was £702.9 per week as opposed to the Scottish average of £740. For female workers it was £645.4, as opposed to the Scottish national average of £701. (Nomis).

However, having one parent in employment is often not enough to avoid poverty. In Scotland, six in ten children in poverty live in households where someone is working, and increasingly, only having two parents at work protects against the risk of poverty.

Children in Argyll and Bute appear to experience a higher level of in-work poverty; 71.2 percent of children of low-income families live in a household where at least one adult is working (6)

This demonstrates the importance of employability measures and the planned economic developments from the Rural Growth Deal. The Rural Growth Deal (RGD) is a 10-year programme that will deliver £70 million of investment to develop Argyll and Bute's economic potential into a successful future for the area. It is hoped this will generate at least 300 jobs, support business development and attract more visitors to the area. Importantly, it will also look to address key housing shortages that hinder such development.

Many of the causes and impacts of child poverty in Scotland's remote rural and island places are known. In Argyll and Bute, we work to address these and make a difference for our children, young people and families. Key to this is working with partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors, with businesses and with our communities. This report shows some of the ways in which we do that.

# **Child Friendly Version of the Plan**

Children and young people are currently working with a Graphic Artist to update the existing graphic, plan on a page version of our Child Poverty Action Plan. This coproduced version will be accessible to children, young people and adults who prefer a more condensed / graphic presentation of the elements of this plan. The graphic plan will be published alongside the main version of the plan.

### **Integrated Impact Assessments**

The council is committed to carrying out impact assessments both to meet our legal obligations and as a matter of good practice.

### Impact Assessments:

- help officers to check they have considered implications and impacts which may arise from their proposals.
- help officers to show they have considered implications and impacts.

- help people interested in potential impacts to see impacts have been considered, and how.
- enable better / more informed consultation and engagement around proposals while they are still in development.
- **enable better scrutiny** around decisions as potential impacts are made more explicit and transparent.

Argyll and Bute Council reviewed its combined impact assessment process in 2024 and launched a new process and online tool in March 2025.

The council's Impact Assessment Tool has been adopted for use by the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership.

The new Integrated Impact Assessment brings together five impact assessment frameworks into a single process. These relate to equality, the Fairer Scotland Duty, Islands Communities, the Consumer Duty, and Children's Rights and Wellbeing.

Work to include Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) has been carried out as part of the council's activities relating to the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As children's rights and wellbeing should be considered not only in the context of proposals targeted directly at children and young people but also proposals which may indirectly affect them, proposals from all parts of the council must be screened to check whether a full assessment of impacts relating to children and young people needs to be carried out.

In line with Scottish Government's approach to CRWIAs, our tool impact includes assessment relating to:

- The United Nations on the Convention of the Child's articles, and
- The eight wellbeing indicators which are key components with in the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach.

In the course of the tool's development, we ran the text and questions relating to CRWIAs past our UNCRC Incorporation Group and took advice from the Improvement Service.

We will be assessing the tool over summer 2025 to monitor its usability and effectiveness.

### **Data and Child Poverty**

In Argyll & Bute our council's Welfare Rights Team makes a real difference in outcomes for families by helping them maximise their uptake of available benefits grants and allowances, securing Client Financial Gain in excess of £4 million per year. However, they're very dependent on existing referral channels such as through social work and education, i.e. cases where there's "known" unmet need. There's a perennial risk that we're missing some households that don't come to light through these channels. Hence a lot of our focus is on trying to utilise data to identify

households where there's as yet "unknown" unmet need; those at risk of falling through the cracks.

So, the value to us of having data on families in receipt of Universal Credit and Scottish Child Payment is essentially the same regardless of which benefit they are in receipt of – if these families are known to us, we can:

- Check if they have already had a referral for support, such as through social work. If they have not, then...
- We would make contact with themg to look to maximise their uptake of other benefits, grants and allowances, especially Council Tax Reduction, School Clothing Grant, Disability Benefits, etc.
- We would also help to ensure they are making their claims at the correct rate, e.g. have they applied for Disability Benefits at the correct level, etc.

\* There is a data governance challenge with a lack of legal gateways through which we could justify direct outreach to households. Working with the Improvement Service and Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability (SAVVI) has been extremely valuable in better understanding the legal constraints around this type of data reuse. In the short term though if we can obtain this data at some sort of aggregated level by location then it would at least allow us to consider targeted outreach say to specific schools where the data suggest, in aggregate, concentrations of unknown unmet need. We hope to achieve more going forward, in terms of being able to use legal gateways to allow us to identify unmet need and approach families directly. If we could increase the current rates of Client Financial Gain by say 15-20% by working with families who would otherwise be missed for lack of referral, but whom we've found through data sharing by DWP/SSS, then this would be a measurable and impactful outcome.

### **Taking Action on Rural Poverty (TARP)**

TARP, set up by the Poverty Alliance, came about as a result of poverty awareness training undertaken as part of Argyll and Bute Council's child poverty action plan. It aims to

- build on the Child Poverty Action Group's work to strengthen infrastructure within A&B for lived experience to be included in decision making.
- support collaboration and networking amongst organisations that work to combat poverty or support their communities with the cost of living.
- using learning from these aims, work with local stakeholders to test and learn about locally appropriate ways to reduce the costs of rural living.

In the past year we have:

- developed and consolidated a citizens' panel of people with experience of living on a low income and/or with high costs due to their rural location.
- Panel members have participated in 12 sessions, exploring their experiences and priorities; learning about local support and providing a lived experience perspective to inform the work of partners including the Council's Revenues and Benefits team, Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface and Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- We have also held joint sessions with our sister panel based in Aberdeenshire.
   These have been convened to respond to timely national issues of interest.
   Individual panellists have also participated in regional and national events including meeting with the First Minister during Challenge Poverty Week to discuss the "Best Start, Bright Futures" plan, and contributing to national panels such as the Trussell Trust's new Scotland-wide lived experience group.
- We recently co-reviewed our progress and aims and over the next year the panel's focus will be on seeking opportunities to engage with and influence decision-making by agencies around local food costs, community resilience and tenant rights.
- We have established quarterly networking and learning events, focused on topics
  of interest identified by local organisations and public sector partners and cohosted with the TSI.
- Our quarterly events include updates and opportunities to share news and practice, and they have been well attended with extremely positive feedback. In the coming year we will continue with this successful model.
- Following extensive stakeholder engagement and based on prioritised by the
  citizens' panel, we have developed a test of change project in collaboration with
  ALlenergy. Poverty Alliance will provide funding and support. In dialogue with
  clients of their Affordable Warmth Service, ALlenergy and their partners will act as
  delivery partners to
  - explore the realised and potential cost savings to social tenants from moving to renewable energy (heat pumps with or without solar panels and battery storage).
  - generate specific information and support to ensure tenants gain the maximum benefit from their renewables.

The funding agreement is now in place and over the next year we anticipate the research element of the project will be completed; resource development and project evaluation will be underway. To ensure learning from the panel, network and test of change would best be integrated into strategic planning, TARP has a local oversight group including representation from Argyll and Bute Council and Argyll and Bute TSI. Updates and opportunities are shared via the local Child Poverty Action Group and Financial Inclusion and Advice Group, as well as Community Planning Partnership's

Area Community Planning Groups (the latter when possible) and by occasional newsletter to a mailing list of over 140 contacts.

Other collaborative activity:

- TARP's project team works closed with the Argyll and Bute Climate Action
  Network to integrate social justice more comprehensively into ABCAN's climate
  work across the region, and vice versa. Argyll and Bute Development Officer,
  Becky Hothersall, has joined ABCAN's steering group and over the next year will
  participate in work focused on food security and community resilience.
- The Poverty Alliance is building a broad coalition of organisations under the banner "Scotland Demands Better" including a national demonstration and march in October 2025.

# **Child Poverty and Mental Health**

When planning to address child poverty it is important to consider the 3 drivers of poverty: income through employment, income through benefits, and the cost of living. Beyond that, it is equally important to tackle the impacts, which can harm individuals and families. The ongoing stress and anxiety caused by living in poverty and trying each day to pay the bills and provide for your children, cannot be underestimated. Children are not immune to this as they witness their parents struggle and live with the knowledge that they cannot have the things that their peers take for granted.

- Mental Health Foundation mental health and poverty statistics
- Child Poverty Action Group Priced Out of School.

Added to this are the pressures of not having any resources in reserve if things go wrong or wear out. Across the UK in 2023 - 2024, The proportion of families with less than £1,500 in savings was 48%, which was the same as last year. Twenty per cent of families reported that they had no savings, and a further 10% said they had less than £100. (7)

A growing body of evidence, mainly from high-income countries, has shown that there is a strong socioeconomic gradient in mental health, with people of lower socioeconomic status having a higher likelihood of developing and experiencing mental health problems.

- Children and adults living in households in the lowest 20% income bracket in Great Britain are two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems than those in the highest.
- In 2004, evidence from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey found that the prevalence of severe mental health problems was around three times higher among children in the bottom quintile of family income than among those in the top quintile.

 Analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study in 2012 found children in the lowest income quintile to be 4.5 times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those in the highest, suggesting that the income gradient in young people's mental health has worsened considerably over the past decade.

### Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation points out that employment status is linked to mental health outcomes, with the unemployed or economically inactive having higher rates of common mental health problems than those employed. However, mental health is also impacted on by low paid and insecure employment. (8)

Housing can also be a factor and those on housing benefit are more than twice as likely to have a common mental health problem than those not receiving it (35.1% vs 14.9%). (9)

# Action For Children - how children are affected by poverty

However, it is the effect of poverty on parents' and children's mental health that continues to have the largest impact and accrues throughout all of childhood, thus intensifying mental health problems for both parents and children over time. (10)

Having the right kind of services and early intervention will help to mitigate the stresses and mental health impacts of poverty.

There are a number of services in Argyll and Bute that help to address and improve mental health and wellbeing, for children, young people and families, whatever the cause.

 A new free service from Argyll and Bute Council, in partnership with Exchange Families is available for parents and carers to help support their child. A range of support, workshops and resources will be on offer to help better understand common issues and learn how you can help.

Exchange Families offers support for parents and carers with concerns about the wellbeing of their children. They provide specialist guidance to families worried about their young people. The organisation helps adults to help their families through workshops, resources, guidance and advice.

There are workshops (in person or on-line) with practical strategies for parents and carers to support their children and young people, covering a range of areas: anxiety, neurodiversity, low self-esteem, self-harm, low-mood, bereavement, family break up. Workshops available to book thus far are:

- Workshops Age 4-7 Promoting confidence and self-esteem in young children
- Workshops Age 8-11 Building confidence and self-esteem in children

- Workshops Age 12+ Techniques for preventing anxiety and panic.
   Stress management techniques for supporting teens
- An online Mental Health Hub Living Well in Argyll and Bute

## Exchange Counselling | Mental Health Service Provider

2. Our children, their nurturing education (OCTNE) is the authority wide education strategy that brings together nurture, adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed practice. This makes a significant contribution to the development of a trauma responsive education workforce. The strategy ensures that children and young people will have access to wellbeing programmes and supports to enhance prevention and early intervention while providing more specialist support where required.

The continued support of 58 establishments, including 52 schools and 6 Partnership Providers, through the OCTNE journey has enabled sustained growth in nurturing environments.

3. Rollout of Trauma Informed and Trauma Skilled training has been offered to child and adult services this session. An additional ~120 staff have attended an inperson training since January. Another cohort of Transforming Connections training for trainers will take place in June, and all trainers now have access to a team's channel, with a view to continuing to roll out a programme of training over the coming year.

### 4. Best Beginnings

Argyll & Bute Infant Mental Health Service, Best Beginnings launched in Spring 2022 and works to support early relationships between babies and their carer's. There is an ongoing training programme offered to professionals, volunteers and students by the Infant Mental Health Practitioner.

### 5. Family Nurse Partnership

In April 2024 the Family Nurse Programme began to be rolled out across Argyll and Bute; it commenced in the Bute and Cowal area. This programme is established in many parts of the World such as the United States, Australia and Norway. In Scotland it has been successfully working in areas like Greater Glasgow and Clyde for several years. This is a preventative, educational behaviour programme that is run by Nurses and Midwives who have received training in skills that include motivational interviewing, agenda matching and the use of tools such as "Partners in Parenting Education" (PIPE).

The programme works with mothers to be who are 21 years old and under; work will begin with participants as early as possible in the pregnancy and continue

until the child's second birthday. Co-working will take place with Midwives and when the child is born, programme staff will take the place of the Health Visitor until a planned handover to them when the child is two years old. This will be for first time mothers and will offer additional support and learning opportunities that they would otherwise not be able to access. The programme focuses on empowering the mother and listening to her needs and views as well as offering support, signposting to other agencies that will assist her and giving her skills to better care for her baby. FNP the person-centred, preventative intervention programme offered to young first-time mother is now being rolled out to include Mid Argyll Kintyre and Islay.

### 6. Kooth

We now offer a free online mental health and wellbeing resource to all 10–18-year-olds in Argyll and Bute. Kooth offers a wide range of help, with a no-wait, no-referral service so any young person can reach out for support, whenever they need it. Read more about how to access Kooth

Kooth – A new mental health and wellbeing tool for children and young people

# 7. Counselling in Schools

School counselling services continues to be available across the authority. Approx. 700 pupils accessed over the past 12 months. 83% of young people and 81% of primary-aged children completing support reported positive clinical outcomes. This is further supported by positive parent feedback, with 100% of parents feeling more confident in supporting their child's emotional and developmental needs and 94% observing positive changes in their child's wellbeing.

### 8. Planet Youth

Planet Youth is an Iceland-originated framework with the aim to improve young people's health, wellbeing and relationships. To achieve this aim parents, carers, schools, communities and organisers work together. Argyll and Bute is one of the six local authorities who piloted the framework in Scotland. In 2023 a survey was conducted during school hours among Year 3 and Year 4 students of five selected schools in Argyll and Bute. As part of this, the participants were asked to rate their mental health status. The majority, 38% (n=286), of respondents rated their mental health as 'good to very good', 28% (n=210) rated it as 'acceptable', 28% (n=208) rated it as 'bad to very bad'. 5% (n=40) of participants did not answer the question. Planet Youth work with children and young people to provide activities and engagement that improves their wellbeing and reduces their likelihood of drug, alcohol use and other negative behaviours.

9. Family Liaison and Health & Wellbeing Officers Family Liaison and Health & Wellbeing Officers have been further supported in a network created to offer opportunity for career long professional learning (CLPL) and to further strengthen the work they do and impact they are making. Evidence around their impact is strong. They are making a real difference to our most vulnerable pupils and their families through a wide range of support. Partnership

work with Bute Advice Centre and ALIenergy for FL/HWB Officers led to co-

creation of a 'Help Leaflet' signposting families to available supports. This has been distributed to all schools with a FLO/ HWB Officer.

### 10. Let's Grow Kids UK

Work with parents in Argyll and Bute during the perinatal period and until a child's third birthday. All staff at LGKUK, (a third sector organisation) are trained in perinatal and infant mental health and infant nutrition. Providing one to one targeted support, they work alongside families helping them to navigate their way through the pressures of family life. Their core programme lasts for 16 weeks, and a parent can stay with the team for as long as they need or until their youngest child is 3. Let's Grow Kids UK use a combination of several parenting programmes including Solihull, Adult mental health and family programmes such as WRAP and support clients to access specialist services such as Bute Advice.

Let's Grow Kids UK have a tiered system for accessing professional support within the team as well as general wellbeing assistance. Every introduction is triaged, and each parent is allocated the most appropriate professional to work with. We have 3 tests of change ongoing in addition to our core programme. These are

- Working with Dads
- Working with parents of children with ASN during their Nursery/School transition year
- Working with parents with poor mental health by providing Psychotherapy sessions (this work is being delivered in partnership with University of Strathclyde)

### **Let's Grow Kids Website**

### 11. The HELP Project (Dunoon and Rothsay)

This project helps young people with housing, debt and benefit advice, employment and wellbeing issues. Referral criteria are between the ages of 16-25-years, homeless, at threat of homelessness or care experienced. It offers a range of wellbeing supports, including parenting groups and life coaching.

### **Help Project Website**

Help Project Email: info@helpltd.org.uk

Help Project Phone: 0800 121 4990

### 12. Home Start Lorn

Home-Start Lorn has been supporting families with young children throughout the whole of the Oban and North Argyll area, including the outlying villages since 1988 and on the Isle of Mull since 2016. Through our home-visiting volunteers we offer a unique service providing practical and emotional support to parents/carers with one or more children under 5.

Contacts

Phone 01631 566749

Email: <u>homestartlorn@btconnect.com</u>

# **Home-Start Lorn**

13. Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface: Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund

The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund has been awarded for another two years – this will be years five and six of the fund. Argyll and Bute has been awarded £285,765.57 for each of the two years. The Fund 'is to be made available to support community-based initiatives that promote and develop good mental health and wellbeing and mitigate and protect against the impact of distress and mental ill health within the adult population. Specifically, the Fund aims to:

- Tackle mental health inequalities through supporting a range of 'at risk groups.
- Address priority issues of social isolation and loneliness, suicide prevention and poverty and inequality with a particular emphasis on responding to the cost-of-living crisis and support to those facing socio-economic disadvantage.
- Support small 'grass roots' community groups and organisations to deliver such activities.
- Provide opportunities for people to connect with each other, build trusted relationships and revitalise communities.

The Fund has a strong focus on prevention and early intervention and aims to support grass roots community groups in tackling mental health inequalities and address priority issues of social isolation and loneliness, suicide prevention and tackling poverty and inequality.

# The Promise and Whole Family Support

The promise, made by the Scottish Government following work done by the Independent Care Review, to care experienced children and young people is built on five foundations: family, voice, care, people and scaffolding. They show what's important for any child to grow up loved, safe and respected. You can find out more about The Promise here:

## The Promise – gov.scot

Coupled with this was the vision and Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support to promote consistent standards across Scotland which will help to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and families. In Scotland, Family Support is broadly understood to be a range of services to help families meet their individual needs. The aim is to improve families' wellbeing by providing advice and support to enable them to avoid crisis.

The Scottish Government provides grant funding to the Argyll & Bute's Children's Partnership through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF). The money is designed to support work towards the Promise through innovative practice initiatives.

# Projects which are supported through this fund include

- The Family Placement Team recruited two extra staff to do initial and full assessments on Kinship Carers.
- The Throughcare and Aftercare Team recruited two extra staff to work with young people during their care and aftercare journey.
- The Care Experience Health Team was further developed. This allowed for the CAMH's Team to have formulation meetings with staff from the three residential children and young people's houses (Shellach View, East King Street and Dunclutha).
- A Trauma Coordinator has been appointed, and this is proving to be a key post in helping to further develop the trauma informed approach that all our staff are trained in.
- Developing the joint work between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Education to support families of children exhibiting emotional distress has proven to be very successful. A Head Teacher for Care Experienced Children and Young People has been appointed and works across schools.

### Residential Children's Houses 2024 - 2025

Work has been undertaken to further develop training for staff in our residential children's houses. The impact of this training has supported achieving positive destinations for the young people who had been supported to transition to independent living. One house has recruited qualified social workers, colleagues from education and throughcare services. Having a suitably qualified workforce we can consider early intervention in the community to target support to families and provide a response to young people whose needs may be more complex.

Staff teams within the Houses have been trained in Therapeutic Theory training by CALM, along with Therapeutic Care Giving training facilitated by CAHMS care experienced team. There is progress in the number of practitioners trained in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP).

# Family Placement 2024-2025

Recruitment of foster carers is a national problem. We get more inquiries from prospective adopters than people interested in fostering, but it would appear this mirrors the national picture. We continue to work to recruit more foster carers.

Continuing care arrangements with previous foster or kinship carers has been strengthened with the decision to retain a supervising social worker from the family placement team to work alongside the carers post conversion to continuing care providers, offering support to them in this new role of helping the young person transition to independence when ready; this will include annual reviews.

We have updated Kinship policy and procedures and taken most work associated with kinship into the family placement team. This has led to a quicker initial assessment when children go to stay with kin, as well as a smoother transition from Interim to permanent kinship arrangements. Kinship Carers have had opportunities to meet up with foster carers and adopters at joint events.

Going forward, we will develop our review process for kinship carers that will ensure we know the circumstances of all kinship carers and the children they care for, including those no longer involved with a child's social worker.

We plan to introduce Family Group Conferencing, which will make the initial exploration for kinship carers more robust and allow a full discussion including family members who can't take on the care of a child full time but can support another family member to do so. The Family Placement Team will undertake assessment, training, support and review of supported lodgings providers. It is hoped that this will increase the options for young people leaving Care, this will be a joint venture with the Throughcare team.

# **United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

In October 2023 the Argyll and Bute UNCRC Implementation Group applied for a grant from the Scottish Government, CORRA Foundation led, UNCRC Innovations Fund. This was set up to give Councils the funds to embed children's rights in their area following the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. The bid was successful and £53,000 was awarded to achieve the following objectives.

- 1. In coproduction with children and young people, create a series of celebratory events that inform children, young people and their parents and carers about children's rights and the new act.
- 2. Create an awards scheme that, in coproduction with children and young people, will encourage embedding of children's rights into the work of the Council and its partners.
- 3. Create materials that can be used going forward to increase awareness of children's rights in Argyll and Bute.

All these outcomes were achieved; key things to note in the work of this project include:

- 17 events took place that celebrated children's rights and informed children, young people and parents / carers and staff about the new act. In total 2475 children and young people were directly involved with events and the coproduction of new materials for use going forward.
- An awards scheme was commenced, and children and young people have helped to design badges and plaques that will be used in the scheme.
- Two children's rights workshops were held for parents, carers, staff and other interested adults.
- Children and young people have been involved across Argyll and Bute, from our islands, rural places and towns. This has included those from early years, primary and high schools and young people not in school. The range of communities and groups included has been extensive and includes refugee and asylum-seeking children and young carers.
- Material created for future work in this area include small libraries of children's rights / inclusive and LGBTQ books in several schools including Tobermory and Rothsay high schools. Pens provided with the books that will read aloud, allowing children and young people to share them with parents where English may not be a first language etc. A new LBTQ+ flag designed by children and young people, a graphic version of the children's rights plan, a graphic poster for early years settings and parents that signposts to information about relevant rights and resources and has a QR code which directs people to a Council webpage on resources for parents with babies and young children. A film created by Young Carers about their challenges and the importance of their rights. A variety of materials from individual events that will be visible to children and those in communities going forward, for example bags, fridge magnets, t-shirts and mugs.

All of this combines with key elements like informed leadership, impact assessments that encompass children's rights, a child friendly complaints procedure, coworking with youth and community groups, the creating of child friendly documents, and the provision of training for staff. Going forward we will keep children's rights and voices at the centre of the Council's work and recognise that they must be respected if we are to effectively tackle child poverty.

## The Plan

# A. Increasing income From Employment and Earning

# 1. Employability

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

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

- Lone Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parents with a disability or families who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have a disabled child
- Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have 3 or more children
- Parents from a minority ethnic background who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have a youngest child
- Parents who are aged <25 who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty</li>
- Other low-income parents, i.e. kinship carers who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty.

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

through appropriate support focusing on intensive Key Worker support.

Low-income families are supported to increase their income through work, both through supporting parents to access paid employment and in helping those in lower paid jobs to progress to higher paid employment. Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team and Third Sector partner Inspiralba (lead of a large consortium across Argyll and Bute) deliver intensive in and out of work employability support to parents, including person centred support to upskill, apply for jobs, gain progression whilst employment, money advice, health support, motivational support, complete accredited training, etc. Bute Advice and ALlenergy are key partners within Inspiralba's consortium helping to assist parents to maximise their household income and reduce fuel costs.

The Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership (ABEP) identified lack of childcare as a barrier to work for parents. In response, our Third Sector partner Inspiralba developed a pilot programme to support parents through the process of becoming registered childminders utilising the Child Poverty funding. The pilot recognised that whilst support was available to access childminding, additional coaching and support would enable parents with limited confidence and on a low income to pursue this career and progress into self-employment. All parents who enter the childminding programme are supported by an Employability Coach to build confidence; coordinate training including Paediatric First Aid and Food Hygiene and guide them along their journey. The Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) provide specialist support, including the 'Childminding Induction Programme' and Argyll and Bute Council's Early Years Team assist with area specific advice. Bute Advice provide specialist benefit advice, and an experienced local Childminder offers additional mentoring. Assistance with set up costs, including purchase of toys, equipment and minor adaptations to the home to ensure Care Commission Compliance is also available. InspirAlba ran the pilot in 2023/24, of the 5 parents who commenced, 4 of which are now in business and the 5<sup>th</sup> secured a post with Social Work. Due to the pilot's success a further 4 places were offered in 2024/25, all of which were filled and are doing extremely well working towards becoming fully qualified childminders. When operational these childminders will help to tackle the shortage in childcare in the rural communities of Islay, Tighnabruich, Ford and Tarbert. It is planned a further 2 places will be available in 2025/26.

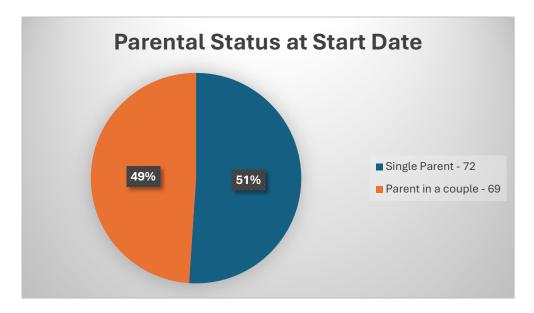
The ABEP also recognised specific gaps relating to family poverty (supporting parents with creative cookery skills for nutritious family meals and access to the hospitality sector). Inspiralba worked in partnership with Fyne Futures to devise a pilot programme. A programme was created to support parents to develop skills, confidence and accreditations to test trade as childminders, which will increase capacity for this gap. As with the childminding this pilot was also successful with further places being available in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

**Parental Welfare Fund** is aimed at parents receiving support through the PESF who successfully secure employment. Applications are welcomed by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team. These monies help with the transition to work and can alleviate any worries. The fund offers up to £1,000 payable over the first 13 weeks of employment. **Further information on the Parental Welfare Fund** 

Funded by the Scottish Government a Child Poverty Co-Ordinator was recruited in June 2024 by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team. This post provides critical additional resource within Argyll and Bute Council to support the delivery of commitments set out in the Scottish Government's policy intent of 'No One Left Behind' and 'Best Start Bright Futures', by ensuring alignment between the Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership and wrap-around services that support parents' transition or progression within work, such as childcare and transport. The original postholder has since left however a replacement commenced the role in May 2025.

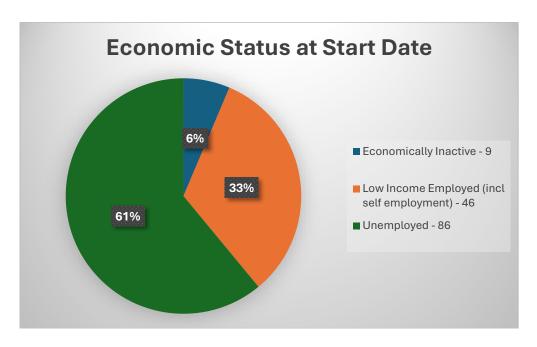
# During 2024/25 a total of 141 parents commenced support under PESF/NOLB

A Pie Chart showing parental status at start date. 49% (69 people) were a parent in a couple. 51% (72 people) were single parents.



\* Please note the above figures are based on parents who have engaged for the first time in 2024/25 and not those who are restarts to the service.

A Pie Chart showing economic status at the start date. 61% were unemployed (86 people), 33% were low income employed (including self-employed) (46 people) and 6% (9 people) were economically inactive.

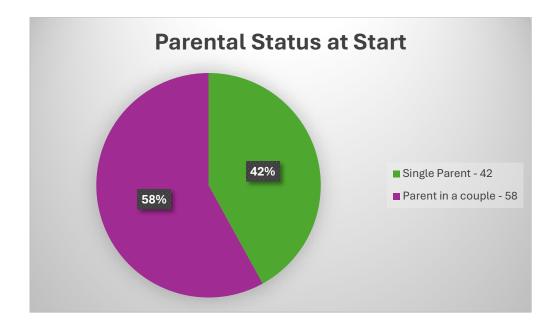


Page 23 of 64

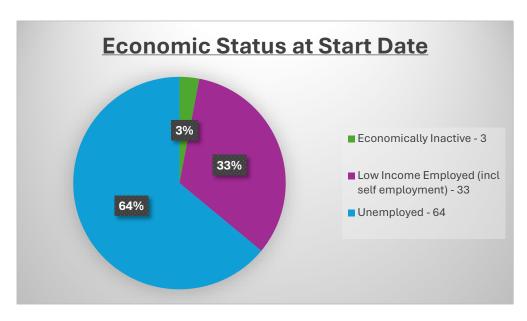
Of these 141 parents, 64 advised at the outset of support they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more.

In addition to the 141 parents who joined the PESF Service in 2024/25, a further 100 parents still being supported at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, were carried over to continue support in 2024/25.

A Pie Chart showing parental status at start. 58% (58 people) were parents in a couple, 42% (42 people) were single parents.



A Pie Chart showing economic status at start date. 64% (64 people) were unemployed, 33% (33 people) were low income employed (including self-employed), 3% (3 people) were economically inactive.



Page 24 of 64

Of these 100 parents carried over to continue support in 2024/25, 48 advised at the outset of support they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more.

A total of 97 parents exited the PESF service in 2024/25: 32 commenced employment thus having a positive impact on their household income. Of these job starts, 18 (56.25%) entered self-employment being the ideal option to accommodate their family circumstances. A further 5 parents commenced volunteering, 4 moved into further/higher education and 35 completed accredited training.

All PESF programmes continues to be available to continuing parents and new start parents in 2025/26. As an alternative to PESF and NOLB, unemployed parents also have the choice to receive support from the following employability options should they decide this support best meets their needs:

**UKSPF Work Placements and Training** delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team. Both interventions funded by the UK Government.

Work placements offer the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge to assist with moving into future employment:

- 4. 13 or 26-week duration
- 16 or 30 hours per week
- Real living wage paid
- Up to £100 per person work clothing allowance
- Training can be funded on an individual basis
- Each participant will have a dedicated Employability Support Worker to assist with job search, interview skills, in work support, etc

A total of 10 unemployed parents (1 single parent/9 parent in a couple) completed a work placement in 2024/25. Of these 1 reported a disability or long-term health condition at start date. A total of 7 parents have moved into employment and 3 are currently job seeking.

Training monies are also available to apply for full or partially funded accredited training. The aim is to:

- Assist those who are unemployed move into work
- Help those in low-income employment (earning up to £17,000 per annum) to upskill/retrain to enable them to apply for higher paid positions

A total of 42 parents (21 lone parent / 21 parent in a couple) accessed the training intervention in 2024/25. Of these parents 7 were low income employed, 7 low-income self-employed, 26 unemployed and 2 economically inactive.

To date 9 parents who were previously unemployed have secured employment, 1 previously unemployed is now self-employed, 2 low income employed and 2 low income self-employed have increased their earnings as a direct result of the training, 1 low income employed remain in their current post and is seeking new employment, 4 have advised they no longer wish to undertake the approved training, 3 are job

seeking and 5 have disengaged and are uncontactable. The remaining 15 parents are still undertaking training.

UKSPF Work Placements and Training interventions continue to be available in 2025/26.

# Parental Employability Support Successes

## Case Study 1

M is a Ukrainian Refugee and a single parent with 2 children. She was referred to Argyll and Bute Council's PESF Engagement Worker by the Resettlement Team.

M was unemployed for over 6 months, her main barriers to employment were childcare, transport and English not being her first language. M was desperate to find part time employment to fit around school hours. Along with the help from an interpreter, M's PESF Engagement Worker supported her to complete a CV, look for employment, complete applications and go through mock interviews. She was also supported to attend her Job Centre appointments as she was lacking in confidence to attend alone. Through handing out her CV to hotels, M was offered a permanent job, 20 hours a week which fits around her children and still gives her time to study English. M's Engagement Worker supported her to complete all the necessary documentation to accept the position. M was able to apply for the Parental Welfare Fund which has been a great help with clothing and travel to and from work.

Out with employability support, M's Engagement Worker supported her to apply for a school clothing grant and look for local holiday clubs/activities for her children during the school holidays.

M is happy in her employment, in the future once her English improves, she would like to study.

Quote from participant:

'Thank you very much for your help. I admire your kindness and professionalism.'

## Case Study 2

B and has 2 children, 1 is only 9 months old. She self-referred as she heard about the programme through a friend who had also benefitted from the programme.

B had just started a mobile nail business when she fell pregnant with her youngest. She was building some clientele and going to peoples' houses. Once she had her baby she was keen to get set back up again. She hoped to look into the possibility of having a shop to work from as this would give her the flexibility for childcare which was one of the biggest barriers.

B wanted to be able to expand her business and increase her income, she also wanted assistance with cash flow and business help to see if having a shop in town would be

viable. InspirAlba were able to help B through the process of taking on a lease for a property, provide some basic equipment and support with a cashflow analysis. They then referred her on to Business Gateway for further support and grant assistance.

B has now been operational for 10 weeks. She is fully booked with clients and has been successful in sub-letting a chair within her premises to another local person.

## Case Study 3

J is a single mum of 28 with a young daughter aged 6 months at the beginning of contact. She struggled to find work due to the lack of public transport. J did not have access to a PC and her mobile phone was outdated making access to vacancies and online openings for employment and electronic applications a huge challenge.

The importance of face-to-face meetings with J proved valuable for social interaction and a better understanding of both her domestic situation alongside the challenges faced in seeking employment. Initially a laptop was purchased and an updated mobile phone, creating a fairer opportunity for J to approach employers and to have a wider look at local possibilities. This was met with a hugely grateful response from J, giving her an added positive outlook to her future.

A driving Theory test was organised and J passed with a score of 96%, this boosted her confidence enormously. This has been followed by driving lessons with a local Driving Instructor. She has concentrated very well on her driving lessons and is considered ready for her up-coming practical test date. J looks forward to with great excitement, recognising the life-changing possibilities this could bring.

J's indicated she would like to train as a massage therapist, but she believed this may not be possible due to her circumstances. She was open to other training offered, including a Paediatric First Aid course which she completed over a 2-day training weekend, with an extremely positive attitude and found the course of great value.

She also attended one of Inspiralba's Creative Cookery sessions. All attendees received a multi cooker and ingredients starter pack, which has been hugely appreciated and given an access to greater diet ideas and nutrition for J and her young daughter. She has been able to begin to introduce new foods and home cooked meals.

Feedback from J's successful completion of the 2-day Paediatric First-Aid course was extremely positive. She was a valued member of the course, with excellent interaction and involvement. J was a positive member of the Creative Cookery session, supporting others with ideas and an upbeat and friendly attitude for successful completion.

J received support to apply for jobs and after a successful interview, has now secured her 'dream job' as a trainee Massage Therapist in a nearby town.

### Quote from participant:

"Learning to drive has given me confidence in myself and my abilities. In the long term, once I pass my test, it will open up so many opportunities for me such as driving to work and going for fun days out with my little girl. The freedom I will gain through driving is limitless."

#### **Plans Ahead**

To continue to play an active role in contributing to the reduction of child poverty in Argyll and Bute by marketing all employability support available to encourage parents to sign up to whichever support best meets their individual needs.

The receipt of the 2025/26 Offer of Grant from the Scottish Government on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 was much welcomed. This has allowed the Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership (ABEP) to discuss delivery priorities utilising the funding allocation available. As a result, the Parental Employability Support Fund continues to support unemployed and low income employed parents.

The Parental Transition Fund will also continue to be available in 2025/26 to provide financial assistance to parents in the first 3 months of employment.

The Employability Team has secured additional UK Government funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to offer unemployed residents of Argyll and Bute pre-employment support, training and work placements. Training will also be available to those in low-income employment who hope to upskill to enable them to apply for higher paid job opportunities. All interventions will continue to be available from April 2025 to March 2026.

Full details of all support currently available to assist parents to increase income through earnings

## 2. Skills Development Scotland Argyll and Bute

**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 groupwork and 1-1 coaching conversations. We work closely with 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. From 1 June to 31 December 2024, we delivered **3,484** Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for **2,418** school pupils through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions.

What We Do - Scotland's Career Service

**School Leaver Cohort 23/24 - 796** young people left school during the 23/24 school cohort and our team worked hard over the summer months to follow up whose had left to ensure support was offered. The December 2024 Interim Participation Snapshot showed that of the 3,250 16–19-year-olds in Argyll & Bute **93.7%** were in education, employment or training and personal development.

**Post School Service Next Steps** – Our service supports young people aged 16 – 18 (extended to 26 for care experienced young people) who are unemployed, helping them to build up their career management skills and move on to and sustain a range of options as appropriate: Training programmes, employability support, education and employment. From 1 April to 31 December 2024, we delivered **372** Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for 243 post-school customers through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions.

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

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

PACE support is available to **all individuals** affected by redundancy.

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

- Help with CV's, job search, applications, and interviews.
- · Advise on benefits, staff may be entitled to
- Provide information on learning and training opportunities.

PACE support is delivered using a variety of delivery methods including Face to face, PACE Helpline, through webinars and enhanced online resources. From 1 April to 31 December 2024, we supported **8** employers and **64** individuals dealing with redundancy.

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

**My World of Work-** Our website provides trustworthy, expert information and advice and it's free to access for people at any stage in their career. The site is designed to support people of all ages and stages, with activities and tools to help them identify the opportunities open to them. Our school, post school and PACE career coaches have been supporting Argyll and Bute customers by sign posting them to my world of

work for opportunities and developing their career management skills. Parents and schools have been using this service to support pupils with their career journey. Find out more at www.myworldofwork.co.uk

**Local Employability Partnership:** Skills Development Scotland (SDS) supports the **Local Employability Partnership (LEP)** in Argyll and Bute by aligning skills and careers services with the region's child poverty priorities. This includes:

- Targeted support for parents and carers through the No One Left Behind strategy, helping them access training, apprenticeships, and sustainable employment.
- Collaboration with local partners to deliver integrated, person-centred employability pathways that reflect Argyll and Bute's rural challenges and sectoral opportunities.
- Contributing to key local priorities such as increasing income from employment, reducing the cost of living, and supporting early years and whole-family wellbeing.
- Embedding The Promise and trauma-informed practice in service delivery, ensuring support is inclusive and responsive to families facing disadvantage.

## 3. UHI Argyll and University of the Highlands and Islands

Student enrolment and achievement has improved slightly in the academic year 2024-25 although it has remained a very challenging times for learners. More than 40% of learners now present with some level of learning need or disability, requiring more support arrangements or course adjustments being put in place to help learners to succeed. The greatest rise in support needs has been around mental health, increased numbers of students with neurodivergent conditions, and general social anxiety. The college Mental Health Counsellor has been working at capacity but so far has been able to keep waiting lists down to no more than two weeks.

The college has worked on changing some of the course delivery patterns to attempt to make the courses more accessible to students – fitting around school hours, offering shorter courses of 11 or 17 weeks rather than 34 weeks, building course work around projects rather than units, leading to a more holistic style of learning.

Cost of living support continues to be a key activity. Students are supported to access any relevant funding that they are eligible for and students who have remained on benefits have been supported with one-off uplift payments. SAAS and the Student Loan Company have increased loan amounts as well as providing a Special Support Loan of £2400 for full time Higher Education students. These measures appear to have been successful as fewer students have applied for college Hardship and Discretionary funds in the year 2024-25. Students are able to apply for the long-term loan of a college laptop for the duration of their course so that they can access online learning on more suitable devices.

Over this current year the college has worked in developing a trauma informed approach. This is an ongoing activity to ensure that the ethos is embedded across the college.

Looking forward to the next academic year we will:

- Continue to develop our support for Care Experienced students, Student Carers and Estranged students.
- Continue to develop our curriculum to better meet the needs of our learners and the communities we serve
- Provide more opportunities for work based learning and Modern Apprenticeship courses.

#### 4. Education

# **Early Years**

We continue to deliver a paid childcare service model on three of Argyll and Bute's rural island communities and are now looking to extend this into two urban areas in response to the needs of working parents. As we are acutely aware that we have areas where rurality can exacerbate parental difficulties in accessing paid employment, we hope to support parents back into work and/or training. As such, this service prioritises parents who require the childcare to attend work rather than another reason. Increased levels of collaboration centrally have produced an infographic overview of how children's rights are supported in a multiagency approach across Argyll and Bute. This has been shared with all ELC settings supporting workforce understanding of rights-based practices in relation to community services. Parents also have access to this information, supporting them to access services which support their children.

We have continued to develop and review our Career Long Professional Learning Offer (CLPL) approaches to ensure outcome-focused improvements in planning which will support children's developmental progress, especially those most at risk of diminished outcomes as a result of the poverty-related attainment gap.

Our ASN locality networks continue to attract participation and practice sharing across localities. Feedback shows this is developing our workforce understanding of strategies to support children with additional support needs.

16% of ELC settings received blocks of focused literacy interventions by EY excellence and equity leads, targeting children's listening skills. Data, in relation to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, was used to identify which groups of children were targeted to receive these play-based interventions. In all settings, children's listening skills improved as a result of the intervention, with almost all children's skills progressing at pace, as evidenced through tracking and monitoring

data. Practitioner feedback gathered demonstrates increased confidence by almost all staff involved to continue delivering the focused intervention independently, leading to improved literacy attainment within this curriculum organiser for all children within the settings involved.

4% of ELC settings received blocks of focused numeracy interventions by EY excellence and equity leads, targeting the five principles of counting. Data, in relation to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, was used to identify which groups of children were targeted to receive these play-based interventions. Observation and tracking data showed that 100% of children engaged in the project improved their understanding of number and counting and qualitative data from parental feedback reinforced this evaluation. In all 3 settings, practitioners reported that their understanding of teaching number concepts and counting had increased, and all were confident in their capacity to continue this work independently.

Our collaboration with health colleagues to deliver parental information sessions via community 'buggy walks' has increased, and we now have regular sessions in almost all mainland, urban towns. Parental engagement continues to grow in relation to numbers of parents attending regular sessions, and feedback shows the sessions are delivering early support for parents in the areas of dental health, speech and language development and parental mental health.

# **Primary/ Secondary Education**

Education Officer for Scottish Attainment Challenge continues to support schools in their planning for Pupil Equity Funding allocations to ensure robust, targeted interventions are in place to help close the poverty related attainment gap. Proportionate visits and supports are made to all establishments in receipt of PEF and work continues to ensure these spends lead to quality impact in improved outcomes for learners and families most affected by the poverty related attainment gap. Schools have been supported in measuring this impact and its sustainability for accelerating progress. Case studies of effective practice have been produced and shared, giving schools the opportunity to learn from each other in a model of self-sustainable improvement.

New Lead Officer for data has worked with officers to refresh data packs produced for schools. The development of new school dashboards is assisting schools in analysis of data in a more accessible way with the ability to filter more effectively for children and young people in their settings experiencing / at risk of poverty. Education Management team continues to work closely with Head Teachers to support the analysis of attainment data. Stretch aims set for 23-24 were met in Literacy and Numeracy (P1, P4, P7) Targets set for pupils at SIMD Q1 were met in Numeracy and were within 2pp in Literacy. This reduced the poverty related attainment gap between the lowest and highest SIMD Quintile pupils by a further 2.41pp in Numeracy from the previous year (2023). Due to

increased attainment in SIMD Q5 pupils, the poverty related attainment gap between the lowest and highest SIMD Quintile pupils in Literacy slightly increased by 1.02pp from the previous year (2023).

PEF spends over the last 4 years evidence an encouraging **upward trend** in overall investment spend, rising from 63% investment in 2021/22 to 84% investment in 2024/25

Staffing remains the biggest investment of PEF within our schools. (87% of PEF schools committing to additional staff). The largest proportion is spent on Pupil Support Assistants (44 in post) who are working with targeted groups of pupils with identified gaps in learning to support increased progress in attainment. Additional teaching staff have also been recruited by some schools to target this type of intervention (17 in post) Progress and Achievement data and progress towards stretch aims point to improvements. Another significant proportion is allocated to FL / HWB Officers (19 in post).

Four Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) have also been appointed centrally to support the development of the Single Point of Access. With 1 FLO per locality area, this will help ensure a more equitable provision across the local authority. This is in addition to the FLOs who have the specific remit to support our care experienced young people or employed through PEF. Evidence around their impact is strong and features within a Scottish Government case study. They are making a real difference to our most vulnerable pupils and their families through a wide range of support. A research study will be undertaken between August-December 2025 on the work of our FLOs to identify the support areas which derive the greatest impact on our children and young people. This will be used to inform consistency and future planning.

Partnership work with Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has resulted in a number of schools further examining the cost of their school day. This is leading to strategic planning within those schools to consult with their community to plan and implement strategies to reduce the associated financial pressures facing families. A number of schools participate within CPAG's national Cost of the School Day Voice network. This ensures the issues associated with rural poverty are better represented.

An authority information leaflet will be shared with all schools in June 2025 which can be used to let families know about financial entitlements.

Liaison is taking place with Social Investment Scotland in relation to a financial inclusion pilot. This is with the aim of ensuring that every child leaves school with a bank account. We are working with them to consider piloting this in a secondary school where there is limited access to a bank. We are keen to

ensure that we are addressing some of the barriers that young people may have in accessing a bank account in our rural and island areas.

£5000 has been earmarked from SEF funding for a participatory budgeting (PB) project to benefit pupils experiencing poverty. Project planning for this is being taken forward to explore a pilot PB project with all the island schools on Islay in 2025/26.

28% of our schools currently provide a Breakfast Club. 95% of these are offered as a universal provision (open to all) and in over a third (38%) they also work with identified families to target the offer. 71% of the provision is funded through PEF with staffing and catering supplies being the highest committed spends. A third of the schools have been able to access additional community funding to support their provision. (33%) Over half of the schools' evidence impact in improved attendance (62%) and engagement in learning (67%) as a result of their Breakfast Clubs and all schools (100%) would like to continue their provision as a long term and sustainable feature for their establishments.

The recent announcement from the Scottish Government on 'Bright Starts' grants will give individual schools the opportunity to bid for this additional funding to either provide a new Breakfast Club or to augment / sustain current provision.

Professional learning has been offered to all education staff, considering education priorities alongside council wide priorities. An expanded Equity Network has enabled a wider reach beyond FLOs and HWBOs to all interested education staff.

Run in partnership with HSCP colleagues, Money Counts training was a new addition to the Education Career Long Professional Learning calendar in 24-25.

CLPL	Roles within Education	Number of attendees
Equity Network - CPAG	Family Liaison Officers	5
	Health and Wellbeing	
	Officers	
	MCR Pathway Coordinators	
	Headteachers	
	Education Support Officers	
Equity Network – Breakfast	Family Liaison Officers	8
Clubs	Health and Wellbeing	
	Officers	
Equity Network – Cost of the	Family Liaison Officers	12
School Day	Health and Wellbeing	
	Officers	

CLPL	Roles within Education	Number of attendees
	Headteachers and senior	
	leaders in schools	
Equity Toolkit	Family Liaison Officers	6
	Health and Wellbeing	
	Officers	
	Headteachers	
	Education Support Officers	
Planning for Impact in PEF	Headteachers and senior	19
	leaders in schools	

Argyll and Bute remain committed to 'Keeping the Promise' for our care experienced children and young people CECYP). Our Care Experienced Education Team consists of a Virtual Head Teacher and four Health and Wellbeing Family Liaison Officers. At any one time, there are approximately 300 CECYP across our authority education settings. We also support young people who are hosted out-with our authority, both in mainstream and specialist settings. CLPL opportunities are supporting staff at all levels to better understand the needs of our CECYP. Comprehensive training such as Keeping the Promise and Designated Manager training is supporting an increased awareness of CECYP needs and how best to support this cohort. This has resulted in an authority wide commitment, including our Chief Officers Group, to continue to work towards Keeping the Promise and having high aspirations for our CECYP. This is demonstrated by CECYP voice being reflected in 'Our Children Their Future – Thriving Together.'

Ensuring our CECYP have all they require to thrive and achieve their potential, remains a key priority for the council. Education Service actions and data shared with both the Community Services Committee and the Corporate Parenting Board, has been received positively with endorsement given for the work to continue. The funding from the Scottish Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge CECYP Fund is demonstrating clear effectiveness with progress for our CECYP that align to our outcomes, as evidenced by our data.

Enhanced scrutiny and awareness of our CECYP is showing a very good impact on National 4 qualification pass rates. In 23-24, we maintained a 100% pass rate for Level 4 Literacy, Application of Mathematics – 15.5% above the national average. 72% of learners who presented for Higher/Advanced Higher achieved grades A – D, 32% achieved grades B – C. Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data for P1, 4 and 7 evidence three-year positive progress since 2021. CECYP attainment has increased in every area and the attainment gap between CE and no-CE pupils has reduced (whilst non-CE pupils continue to improve).

Effective partnership working through Corporate Parenting Board attendance and wider Education Service continues to be refined, enhancing the support available to

our CECYP considering their post school destination. The positive impact of this work is evidenced by 94% of CECYP leaver obtaining a positive destination and 83% being in a sustained destination (2023-24).

CECYP Primary attendance in 23-24 was 91.5% and secondary 80.8%. Authority wide polices and effective training such as Maximising Attendance, OCTNE, RRS and We Promise is leading to earlier intervention to support CECYP attendance. This is resulting in personalised attendance support targeted CECYP, including multi agency approaches to offer whole family support. Pupil voice evidences the positive impacts on wellbeing and inclusion

Strategic commitment and prioritising of GIRFEC, The Promise and OCTF has led to greater awareness across settings of the positive impacts of bespoke approaches, early intervention and trauma informed approaches. This has resulted in a year-on-year decrease of exclusion since 2020. As a result of this commitment, zero CECYP were excluded in 2023 – 24. As at May 2025, zero CECYP have been excluded in the 2024-25 academic session.

As part of our involvement in the testing phase of Scottish Government's draft framework 'Improving the Educational Outcomes of CECYP' (soon to be finalised) we have developed key measures focused on attendance, exclusion, attainment and post-school destinations. In addition, we have identified local outcomes related to the enhancement of professional learning, which collectively support and strengthen our ongoing improvement efforts.

The Addressing Non-Attendance (ANA) procedures have been further strengthened by engagement with Education Scotland's Quality Improvement Programme (QIP) on Addressing Non-Attendance. We will be developing our approach to attendance by sharing the learning from that have been developed from ANA and the QIP. Attendance stretch aims will remain a discussion as part of Education Managers Quality Improvement Visits.

In August 2024, Argyll and Bute Council extended its partnership with MCR Pathways to add Rothesay Academy to the existing MCR programmes at Oban High School, Dunoon Grammar School and Hermitage Academy.

MCR Pathways is a national charity which seeks to improve the wellbeing and life chances of Care-Experienced or otherwise disadvantaged or vulnerable young people through its mentoring programme, which matches such young people in S3-S6 with volunteer adult mentors for weekly meetings of one hour.

The programme brings proven, measurable improvements in attendance, inclusion, attainment and achievement, as well as increasing self-confidence and wellbeing in young people. In each school, the Council employs an MCR Pathways Co-ordinator,

who works to recruit mentors, match identified young people with mentors and prepare identified young people in S1 and S2 for being matched with a mentor in S3. At the end of its second year of implementation, the MCR Pathways programme continues to be highly successful. All targets for recruiting mentors and successfully matching mentors to young people have been exceeded, and the feedback from young people, mentors and schools has been extremely positive. Across the four participating schools, 112 S3-S6 young people are being mentored weekly, and 90 S1/S2 pupils are working towards mentoring in S3.

The next steps for MCR Pathways in Argyll and Bute involve the further extension of the programme to Campbeltown Grammar School, Tarbert Academy and Lochgilphead High School. To overcome logistical and funding challenges, innovative approaches to finance and delivery are being put in place or explored. These include sponsorship by local business partners and the development of a hybrid model of delivering the programme in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce and Skills Development Scotland.

Over school session 2024/25, Argyll and Bute Council has further developed and extended its programme of Flexible Learning Plans (FLPs).

An FLP is an intervention within Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) which provides a bespoke and fully personalised curriculum to vulnerable young people in S4-S6 who are at risk of disengaging with education. Such disengagement can be the result of any number of factors, including mental health, neurodiversity and poverty-related home circumstances. In conjunction with the young person, parents/carers, employers or Further Education and any other appropriate agencies, schools plan an individualised timetable for each young person, focusing on achievement in Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing, which runs in conjunction with learning activities outside of school for an agreed portion of the week. The external element most frequently comprises work placement relevant to the young person's chosen vocational pathway, or a relevant, appropriate further education course.

2024/25 has seen a 10% increase in the number of FLPs, with 41 in place across all secondary schools. As a result of training and rigorous quality assurance, schools' skills and capacity to construct appropriate, impactful FLPs for young people has also increased. Evaluation shows that FLPs revitalise engagement with education for disengaged young people and are supporting the young people most at risk of a negative post-school destination into productive and fulfilling participation in employment or further training.

Argyll and Bute Council has maintained its commitment to UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Programme; we have signed a MOU to ensure that we continue to develop this work beyond the March 2025 Scottish Government funded period.

We have ensured that 21 out of 22 schools that were inactive, are now accredited and expect the last remaining school to be accredited by the end of June 2025. We are currently on target to meet our goal of having 100% of our schools Rights Respecting Accredited. Since February 2024, we have increased Silver accreditations from 11 to 29 and Gold accreditations from 5 to 9. The development of Rights Respecting Schools Award continues to be important in connecting our school communities with local and global child poverty issues. An example of this would be the work that has been led by pupils in a Primary School on the cost of the school day. In taking a rights-based approach to education, schools have been developing or embedding pupil voice structures within their setting. This was particularly evident in a recent consultation on the Education Strategic Vision and Values with "Equity" being a high priority for our learners to see included in the revised document.

Argyll & Bute's Youth Voice Group continue to discuss issues that align with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Plan. Commercial Services attended one of these meetings on invite from the group who wanted to discuss the cost of school meals and the provision of fresh fruit.

Education has continued to be supported by the Alcohol and Drug Partnership to participate in Planet Youth. We had progressed this work from engagement with 2 secondary schools in 2021 to 5 secondary schools in 2023. In September 2025, we will have all 10 secondary schools engaged in the survey. This work, in partnership with colleagues in Public Health, is developing protective factors for young people with the intention of reducing risk factors. Staff that has been secured through grant funding have helped develop community engagement and awareness of the Planet Youth approach. Through this work, Dunoon have re-established a youth group in the area, making a safe social space accessible for young people. Data gained through the survey is shared with other services to help inform improvements. The ADP have also funded third sector organisations to provide the ADP School Support Services across aArgyll & Bute secondary schools. This provides support for young people who may be affected by drug or alcohol misuse (directly or indirectly). The service also supports the delivery of aspects of the health and wellbeing Curriculum as well as increasing awareness with parents/carers.

Smoke Free Me Drama (P7 Production) and You Are Not Alone Drama Productions have continued to be delivered to Argyll & Bute Schools. Changes to the performances were put in place this academic year based on evaluative feedback from all stakeholders. This supported the introduction of vaping as a theme and ensured that delivery of the You Are Not Alone performance was brought done to S2. We are currently working with our partners in health to plan for the introduction of the Daniel Spargo Mabs performances and workshops. A programme of staff and parent workshops will support this development. There will also be a parent/carer workshop

that is to support those with children with an additional support need. The impact of this new programme will be evaluated.

The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme has continued to be developed across our secondary schools. The Programme is a mentor-based programme that addresses gender-based violence. This work continues to be an important part of the Violence Against Women and Girls Project. Over the academic year 24/25, we have taken the number of secondary schools trained from 7 to 10. This has ensured that we met our ambitious target having staff trained in all secondary schools in Argyll & Bute. We have also developed our training staff team, taking this from 2 to 4 staff trained to deliver staff training and a further 4 trained for the newly introduced Primary and ELC training. Over the next year we will be delivering training to Primary and ELC. The work continues to bring together engagement from partners such as ADP School Support Services, Police Scotland and Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis. We will be looking to develop this work further by connecting this to the new iteration of the anti-bullying policy and increasing engagement in Equally Safe registered schools.

Partnership working is an important aspect of our curriculum delivery. We are currently exploring a pilot programme with the Financial Inclusion for Scotland Associate. The aim of the programme is to improve financial inclusion for young people by maximising the opportunity that they have to secure a bank account before they leave school. We will be taking a data informed approach to identifying a pilot school(s) for the programme considering aspects such as rurality, SIMD, ease of access to banks/banking hubs and post 16 destinations.

# **B.** Increasing income Through Benefits

### 1. Benefits

The Benefits Team supported people in 2024-2025 with the following grants.

## **Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants**

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 there were 748 awards paid out to the value of £88,171.

### **Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grants**

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 there were 790 applications made, and 386 awards paid out to the value of £460,964.

## **Total Programme Funding**

For the scheme was £458,284 which resulted in overspend of £90,850, this was met by the Council to enable continued support to vulnerable claimants.

#### Flexible Food and Fuel Fund

From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 the Council paid out £109,920 in grants to householders with food and fuel insecurity and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies for further support. The advice agencies were able to support 965 families achieving a combined client gain of £1.357 million in income maximisation through increasing benefit entitlements.

## **Discretionary Housing Payments**

As of 31 March 2024, our spent and committed amount of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) was £0.968m out of a budget of £1.069m. The Council have a duty to pay DHPs to anyone on the benefit cap and looking at ways to automate DHP awards. A review of the DHP policy is being carried out and a new policy will be presented to the Council later this year.

## **Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund**

In 2024/25 the Council received an allocation of £145,000 to support Island Communities from the Scottish Government.

The funds were spent as follows:

- Scotland Loves Local Cards 1,256 cards issued in December value of £95.
  These cards were issued to Council Tax Reduction recipients on our islands.
  The money on the cards can be spent in a range of local shops. Food Banks a grant of £16,000 was given to each of the 4 Community Food Organisations (Islay Foodbank, Bute Oasis, Tiree Food Project, and Mull and Iona Community Trust).
- Free School Meal Top Ups 100 eligible pupils received payments of £1.60 per day for the school year from August 2024.

### 2. Social Security Scotland, Argyll and Bute

#### **Headlines**

Over 200 stakeholders in Argyll and Bute get regular communication/updates

There is excellent collaboration with stakeholders to get information out to clients using a range of tools including an increasing amount of social media releases. All of these are available on our website.

Stakeholder Resources

Total invested in Argyll and Bute (to Dec 2024) through benefits and grants to lowest income families:

£ 72,321,543

Best Start Grant Early Learning and School Age Payments are paid automatically to parents and carers who already receive Scottish Child Payment so no need to apply for this. Early Learning and School Age payments stats fluctuate depending on time of year (enrolment).

### Social Security published statistics.

Apply for our benefits - Social Security Scotland - mygov.scot

or by calling our Freephone number on 0800 182 2222 (open from 8am – 6pm). Support to claim our benefits is available – just ask for Local Delivery.

Our organisation currently provides 15 benefits

# 3. Welfare Rights Update 2024-25

#### **Achievements**

In 2024-25 we have dealt with 1,219 clients generating a total financial gain of £5.4 million and increase of over 1 million from 2023-24

It should be noted this "client gain" is not just a figure. The support provided by Welfare Rights makes a significant impact on individual's lives. For example, it may mean being able to put heating on, keep a car running, replace a broken appliance etc.

Continued engagement with partners and community groups to reach more clients

The team gained Scottish National standards for Information and Advice Providers accreditation.

#### **Challenges 2024 - 25**

Increased demand for benefit and income checks. It's expected many clients will continue to experience hardship due to the cost-of-living crisis with fuel costs being a major factor.

Likely increase in number of clients approaching us for help with the Universal Credit managed migration process as the DWP are now in the process of transferring over the most vulnerable group of clients who typically need more support.

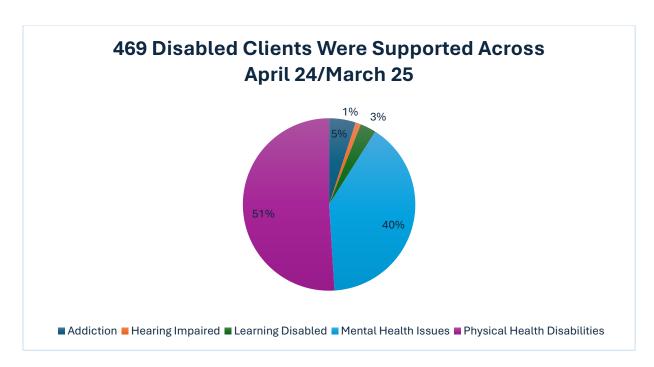
#### **Priorities 2025 - 26**

- Continue to promote and deliver a quality and consistent Welfare Rights Service to residents of Argyll and Bute.
- Ensure that the residents of Argyll and Bute are not missing out on their entitlement to both UK and Scottish Government administered benefits and other related help.
- Provide an enhanced Welfare Rights Service for people affected by cancer.
- continue to work closely with NHS colleagues and the improvement Service to develop Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHP'S) in Argyll and Bute.
- Ensure the service is able to deal with the probable increase in demand for assistance due to the continued roll out of UC managed migration and the roll out of further Social Security Scotland benefits such as Pension age Disability Payment, Scottish Adult DLA and Carer's Support Payment.
- Increase the profile of the service particularly in remote island communities and hard to reach groups.
- Engage effectively with partners and local community groups
- Explore data sharing opportunities in order to identify local vulnerabilities and engage with hard-to-reach clients.

#### 4. Bute Advice Centre

Bute Advice Centre has been incredibly busy supporting communities across Argyll and Bute to access £2.45 million from April 2024 – March 2025 (inclusive). Our mission statement dictates that our priority is to "relieve poverty and distress", this we endeavour to do across the projects we deliver. Many of the client we support have a disability.

A Pie Chart showing that 469 disabled clients were supported across April 2024 - March 2025. 51% of these had physical health disabilities, 40% had mental health issues, 5% had addictions, 3% had a learning disability and 1% were hearing impaired.



19 Carers were supported to claim £15,763.04 of grants.

From April 2024 – March 2025 advisers supported disability benefit claims totalling £947,302.34.

Advisers prioritise ensuring that households with children have access to child specific benefits, including Best Start, Scottish Child Payments, Child Benefit, Pregnancy & Baby Payments, Education Maintenance Allowance and Free School Meals. These claims resulted in a client gain across the year of £60,385.51.

Bute Advice Centre are proud to be part of the award-winning Flexible Food and Fuel Project that has a stand-alone gain of £4.5million across the term of the project, supporting many families since January 2021. In addition to the face to face and telephone advice sessions available to clients, staff also take part in events across the region that support engagement.

Elizabeth Officer, Welfare Rights Adviser, has been attending ARC on a regular basis in Dunoon to help support those suffering from addiction and their loved ones with welfare rights issues.



Ross Semple, Student at Glasgow Caledonia University, supported the delivery of Digital Literacy Lessons in the summer of 2024, helping small groups to use tablets to engage with loved ones, set up internet banking, and use social media. Gifting each participant their own tablet at the end of the 6 introductory lessons, through the Good Things Foundation.

Paul Toop, Welfare Rights Adviser, has also played a major role in providing SIM cards/vouchers for mobile phones, helping alleviate digital poverty through the Good Things Foundation.

Heather Buchanan, Senior Welfare Rights Officer and Colum Buchanan Welfare Rights Adviser have regularly visited the Bute & Cowal area to support individuals requiring home visits and providing information sessions to community groups.

Promoting the ACHA Welfare Rights service and the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund.





Manager, Julie Semple, visited Oban for the Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project (MECOPP) event supporting the Gypsy & Travelling Community where several partner organisations came together to highlight services. Additionally visits to local foodbanks took place, along with the Community Food Forum meetings. Bute Advice Centre enjoy working in close partnership primarily with Inspiralba, Fyne Futures, Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA), Argyll & Bute Council, ALlenergy and Argyll and Bute Citizen's Advice Bureau (ABCAB.)



Additionally, Bute Advice Centre took part in Poverty Awareness events in conjunction with Poverty Alliance locally and at government level and engaged with Migration Policy Scotland. Our plans include continuing collaborations with our trusted partners and broadening the scope of the work we do. Over the coming months we will be delivering community group sessions across the region highlighting ways to make budgets spread further including homemade cleaning recipes, growing your own fruit, veg and herbs, baking our daily bread and a host of other suggestions. We have engaged four new members of the team and look forward to an exciting new year.

# C. The Cost of Living

# 1. Housing

In their Best Start, Bright Futures – Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026, the Scottish Government state that.

We will place the prioritisation of tackling child poverty at the heart of the Affordable Housing Supply Programme

There is a wide range of activities and actions being undertaken by the Council Housing Service and external partners which can help address levels of child poverty

# **Housing Emergency**

In July 2023, Argyll and Bute Council recognised the challenges facing the provision of adequate housing stock within its area by declaring a Housing Emergency, the first local authority in Scotland to do so. In addition to national trends and pressures common across Scotland, unique factors such as geographic isolation, the high number of island communities, dispersed communities, exacerbated the challenges for the housing system in Argyll and Bute. Following a multi-partner Housing Summit, an Action Plan was developed to help deliver improved affordable housing provision in Argyll and Bute. A series of metrics have been agreed to help measure progress annually, including the number of homeless applications helping to put one measure of housing related poverty at the heart of the housing emergency response.

### **Scottish Government Housing Bill**

The Scottish Government's new Housing Bill is presently at stage 2 of its passage through parliament. Amongst the proposals in the Bill are powers to implement rent control areas. This would place a duty on local authorities to assess rent levels within their area and give powers to the Scottish Government to implement rent controls in areas of concern. There would also be limits on when, and by how much, rents can be increased in these areas.

The Bill will also extend duties relating to the prevention of homelessness to social landlords, and a range of public agencies.

## **Housing Need and Demand Assessment**

Argyll and Bute Council are undertaking preparatory work for their 2026 Housing Need and Demand Assessment which includes undertaking a Household Survey across the whole area. The survey will include specific questions in relation to child poverty, to gain a better understanding of the pressures that local households with children are experiencing. The outcome of the survey will feed into the development of the next Local Housing Strategy and identify future priorities

# Number of children in housing need in Argyll and Bute

As of March 2025, 3,069 households were on the HOMEArgyll Common Waiting List. 2,120 of these households were in housing need, and of these, 697 (33%) were households with children, with a total of 1,375 children in housing need.

Waiting list figures show that of the 909 households with children, 697 (77%) are considered to be in housing need. 54 of these households (encompassing 104 children) are on the homeless list.

# **Affordable Housing Supply**

Affordable housing is key to tackling child poverty in Scotland. By pursuing an ambitious strategic new build programme in Argyll and Bute, the Council and its RSL partners are committed to a Green Standard which delivers high quality, energy efficient homes, helping to reduce overall housing costs for its tenants. The following actions are being undertaken in Argyll and Bute to increase the supply of affordable housing:

- **New Builds** In Argyll and Bute, in 2024-2025, 42 new energy-efficient homes were built due to Argyll and Bute's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP).
- Community Housing Network Housing Services has established a Community
  Housing Network to enable Community Housing Trusts and Community
  organisations to obtain the support they require to deliver affordable housing to
  their communities, and to share experiences and learning. Mull and Iona
  Community Trust, for example, are working with the Council to deliver worker
  housing on Mull with infrastructure improvements being supported by the housing
  element of the Rural Growth Deal funding.
- **Buy Backs** The council and HOMEArgyll partners hope to increase the number of homes they are able to buy back from the private sector through the "Argyll and Bute Buy Back Initiative". This initiative has been promoted both by the Council and RSLs. During 2024/25, 14 private homes have been acquired and added to the affordable rented stock.

- Short-Term Let Legislation The Scottish Government considered that introducing the legislation will increase the supply of homes available for local residents. In 2022-2023, applications for Short-Term Letting Licences commenced in Argyll and Bute, with the legal obligation to obtain a licence coming into force in 2023-2024. As of March 2025, 3,494 applications for short-term let licences have been received.
- Supplying homes in the right places and homes for workers The Scottish Government Action Plan to address depopulation recognises the importance of housing for workers in addressing a range of linked social issues such as depopulation, employment and child poverty, stating that

"Secure and sustainable employment helps lift families out of poverty."

High house prices in remote rural and island communities, coupled with an "additional minimum living cost of 15-30%" can prevent the recruitment and retention of staff, especially those on lower levels of pay such as child-care workers. This is evidenced by the range and detail of support and interactions the Council has with developers of housing projects in remote and island locations.

Thus, the links between employment and housing can be fundamental in offering opportunities to avoid falling into poverty.

Through the Argyll and Bute SHIP programme, the Strategic Housing Fund (SHF), and the Community Housing Network, Argyll and Bute Council in 2024/25 have supported the development or provision of new homes in a variety of remote or island locations. Additionally, the Council has recently approved measures to allow the SHF to support housing feasibility studies undertaken by local community groups, thus offering financial support to some specific perceived community needs.

An additional Empty Homes Officer post which is jointly funded by Argyll and Bute Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), with a focus directly on bringing empty and ineffective homes back into use specifically for HSCP staff. This enables easier recruitment of staff within the HSCP, thus supporting service provision for local communities.

The Rural Growth Deal will also increase the number of homes available for workers. The housing element of the Rural Growth Deal is £3m. Two projects are being taken forward, the project in Bowmore, Isle of Islay will focus on housing for sale for principal occupation, and the one in Tobermory, Isle of Mull will provide accommodation for workers.

### Supporting Young People

A lack of affordable housing opportunities for young people leaving the family home, or seeking employment in rural communities, can often press young people into unsuitable, insecure temporary arrangements such as sofa surfing or staying with friends. These insecure and precarious housing arrangements can easily result in homelessness.

Housing Summit surveys showed that a lack of affordable housing opportunities was a common concern with 64% of respondents stating that "Young people are leaving my community due to a lack of housing options."

This concern has also been reflected in interactions with local communities seeking to identify local housing solutions to perceived local problems. Through its Community Housing Assessment Tool (CHAT) the Council Housing Service has been supporting communities in Arrochar and Dalavich to assess local housing needs. In both cases, lack of housing opportunities for young people, coupled with an ageing population, has been a major concern.

## Housing vulnerable families who are more likely to be in poverty

The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) aligns with the aims and objectives of the Argyll and Bute Council Child Poverty Action Plan and outlines a series of actions to address disadvantage and alleviate poverty. These include preventing families and young people in certain situations from incurring rent arrears, from becoming homeless, assisting families with a disabled family member and assisting larger families

#### Insecure tenancies in the Private Rented Sector

Many families live in the private rented sector. This sector is often expensive, and tenancies are less secure, with some families living in this sector being pushed into poverty or even homelessness. This is evidenced by the authors of "Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post 2021", which stated that the largest proportion of those subjected to formal homelessness assessments in Scotland lived in a private rented property. Scotlish Government statistics for 2022/23 show a 74% increase in terminations of Private Rented Sector tenancies due to rent arrears in Scotland, a rate far higher than RSL sectors (21%).

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

#### Homelessness

The Housing Options service assists households, including families and individual young people in identifying the type of home they need and can afford. This service also helps in reducing the number of failed tenancies, ensuring more tenants can remain in their homes. Preventative engagement with households reduces

incidences of homelessness, which contributes to reducing child poverty and outcomes that are more positive for households.

We have seen a significant decline in the number of homeless children in Argyll and Bute in recent years, from 319 in 2017/18, to 195 in 2024/25, however, this is 6 more children than in 2023/24. In 2024/25, 476 homeless cases were closed, of which 121 involved households with dependent children (amounting to 199 children) and 86 of these households received a positive outcome.

There has been a slight reduction in homeless applications between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2024 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2025. During that period, 459 homeless applications were made, a decrease of 34 applications (7% down) in the same period in the previous year.

There are currently 244 statutory homeless households waiting for permanent accommodation, with 55 of these households having children in them. Although there has been a reduction in the number of homeless applications there has been a slight increase in the number of children in homeless households from 189 children in 2023/24 to 195 in 2024/25.

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

# Large households

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

As of March 2025, of those in housing need with children under 16 years, 135 households on the HOMEArgyll waiting list needed a home with four or more bedrooms. This equates to 19% of households with children with a housing need.

Table \*: Number of households with housing need, with children in Argyll and Bute by bedroom size in March 2025

Number of households with children under 16	Minimum bedroom size required
312	Two bed
250	Three bed
135	Four+ bed

Source: HOMEArgyll Common Housing Register March 2025

# • Families with a disabled family member

In Argyll and Bute, considerable work is undertaken to meet the needs of families with a disabled member. In 2024-2025, RSLs built 10 new homes to amenity standards and 2 homes suitable for wheelchair use. A full-time Housing Occupational Therapist (OT) has been employed to work within the housing service to ensure needs are met through the design of new-build housing or by adapting existing public and private sector homes. Children and young people with particular needs will benefit from the bespoke person-centred approach provided by the Housing OT.

# Housing condition, energy efficiency and affordable warmth

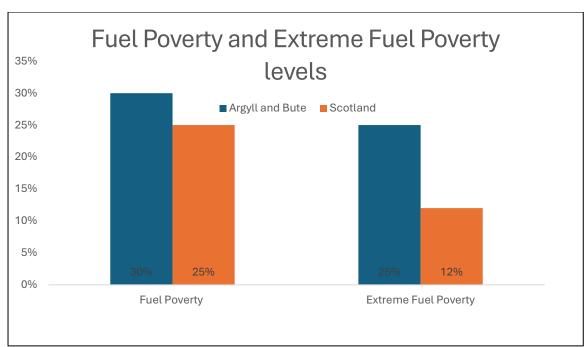
The "Improving our Understanding of Child Poverty in Rural and Island Scotland" report states that:

"fuel costs are known to be a particular contributor to fuel-related poverty in rural and island communities"

The housing condition in Argyll and Bute does not compare favourably with the Scottish average. A higher proportion of homes are in poor condition and fail to meet tolerable standards, mainly due to their failure to meet energy efficiency standards. Living in a cold home has been linked to several health conditions. These conditions often result in children missing school, and this has an impact on their life chances.

Data shows that the average energy demand of homes in Argyll and Bute are 37% higher than the Scottish average, with this then being translated into a similar higher average fuel bill of £1,358 (again 37% higher than the national average). Levels of fuel poverty (30%) and extreme fuel poverty (25%) in Argyll and Bute are also significantly higher than the Scottish average, as shown in the graph below.

A Bar Chart showing Fuel Poverty and Extreme Fuel Poverty Levels in Argyll and Bute compared to Scotland. Fuel Poverty in Argyll and Bute is 30%, in Scotland it is 25%. Extreme Fuel Poverty in Argyll and Bute is 25% and in Scotland it is 12%.



Source; Home Analytics data and Energy Action Scotland

The Council supports discretionary repair and improvement work to private sector properties via the Private Sector Housing Grant. The Council also offers a statutory Scheme of Assistance which can fund housing adaptations.

The Local Housing Strategy outlines a series of actions to reduce energy consumption, such as:

**The SHIP Programme-** Houses built through the SHIP programme will have even higher insulation levels than the 'Greener Standard' requires. However, new build homes only account for a small portion of the housing stock.

**Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES)-** To tackle fuel poverty, the Scottish Government has placed a duty on all local authorities to develop a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and delivery plan. The LHEES will be a locally led, tailored approach to transitioning to climate-friendly heating sources and ensuring local domestic and non-domestic buildings are more energy-efficient.

The council approved its LHEES in November 2024 and this will be accompanied by an Action Plan which will clarify roles and responsibilities. Homes that are more energy efficient will need less energy to reach a comfortable temperature, lowering heating bills and helping to alleviate child poverty.

Energy Efficient Scotland – Area Based Scheme (EES-ABS) – The Area Based Scheme offers grants for the installation of insulation measures to homes of eligible private owners and private rented tenants throughout all areas of Argyll and Bute. Effective insulation makes homes warmer and in turn helps in the reduction of household fuel costs. The Scheme is financed by the Scottish Government and administered by the Council. Argyll and Bute Council continues to utilise their full grant on an annual basis, regularly approaching the Scottish Government for

additional funds. £2,179,827 was awarded for the EES-ABS programme for 2024/25, with the current programme running until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025, and the full amount projected to be spent.

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

**Gypsy/Travellers** – The Housing Service continue to engage with the community and relevant partners through the Gypsy/Traveller Working Group. The purpose of the Working Group is to:

- Understand the accommodation needs and preferences of Gypsy/Travellers to inform future provision.
- Work with Gypsy/Traveller communities to raise awareness of rights and entitlements.
- Ensure that our public services are responsive to Gypsy/Travellers needs and preferences.
- Provide leadership to tackle racism and discrimination.
- Strengthen community development and engagement.
- Work with Gypsy/Travellers to improve their involvement in national and local decision-making.

## 2. ALlenergy Fuel Poverty & Education Summary (2024–25)

#### **Fuel Poverty Support:**

- Target Area: Argyll, Lomond and the Islands, with a focus on rural households facing high energy costs due to lack of mains gas, poor housing, and low incomes.
- **Support Provided:** Crisis grants (e.g., prepayment vouchers, direct payments, white goods), energy advice (tariffs, meters, insulation, damp issues), and financial guidance.

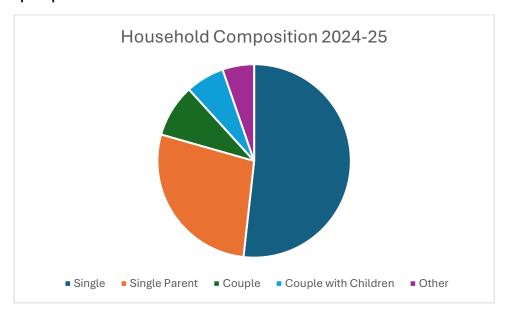
## Client Impact:

- Average client gain of £500 (£200 in crisis funds, £300 in energy savings).
- In 2024–25, £72,105 in direct financial support was accessed for clients.
- Over £6,000 awarded for white goods to families with children; £16,000 in prepayment vouchers issued.

# Demographics:

- One-third of households helped had children; one-quarter were single parents.
- Concerns continue over high summer energy use, especially among families with children.

A Pie Chart showing the housing composition of those helped. No figures are given but by far the largest group are couples with children, over 50%. About 25% are single parents, about 15% are single people and the rest are noted as other.



- Challenges Ahead: End of key funding streams (e.g., Home Heating Support Fund), and the upcoming switch-off of radio-teleswitch meters in June 2025, which may disrupt heating for many electric-only households.
- Partnerships & Outreach: Collaborated with Argyll & Bute Council,
   Bute Advice Centre, and others on the Flexible Food & Fuel Fund,
   which has achieved £5 million in client gains since 2020.
- Delivered online Fuel Poverty Awareness Sessions to 62 professionals.
- Education & STEM Engagement: Delivered STEM workshops and attended career events in six high schools to promote local career opportunities.
- Hosted MAKSTEM Fest with 20+ local employers for S2 students from Campbeltown and Lochgilphead.
- Distributed **P7 STEM career workbooks** to encourage long-term engagement in STEM fields.

 Aims to show young people paths to successful local careers, supporting long-term family and economic resilience in the region.

# 3. Free School Meals and Holiday Provision

Free school meals support for entitled pupils has remained a key way of tackling the cost of living challenges for families with children. All children in receipt of 1140 hours of childcare in early years' settings receive a free school meal, along with free milk and a healthy snack.

All pupils in P1 – P5 are now entitled to a free school meal, including children in P6 and P7 in receipt of the Scottish child payment. In addition, all children and young people attending our Learning centres receive a free school meal.

Cash payments in lieu of free school meals for those in receipt on the basis of need is currently paid via BACS transfer, at the rate of £2.40 during holiday periods; this is funded by Scottish Government.

Pupil feedback continues to be the basis for the development of school lunch menus, and they continue to meet the Food and Drink in Schools standards. One of the Menu Development Assistant key roles is to work with pupils on menu design. Free school meal uptake remains higher than the Scottish average.

The Catering service has worked alongside Education to roll out cashless catering and online ordering facilities to all schools, so that every child can access a meal in a non-stigmatising way that protects their identity. Through the pre-ordering app, each child should also be able to have their preferred meal every day at lunchtime, while enabling conversations with parents around meal choices to become normalised. The Council's Catering Service continues to hold its Soil Association Food for Life Served Here Award at Bronze level, across all primary and Early Years settings, demonstrating its commitment to providing locally produced, sustainable, ethical and locally prepared food, serving food that's good for pupil's health, for the environment and for the local economy.

The Catering team have been working on producing a food map to identify further opportunities for providing more local food through school meals while supporting community wealth building opportunities for our communities. Food cost inflation continues to put significant pressure on both public sector food provision and on household finances.

#### Paid for School Meals

The Council is applying the Cosla Good Practice Principles for school meals debt guidance, along with ensuring that discretionary school meals are available for children who need them when circumstances are appropriate.

### 4. Infant Food Insecurity Pilot

Infant food insecurity has been recognised as a national concern. In 2024 an Argyll and Bute Infant Food Insecurity Group was formed to look at this locally. The following actions were taken:

- A leaflet was created specifically for Health Visitors and Midwives to use to advise parents. Training on the use of the leaflet and offering assistance, was given.
- The leaflet itself was shared more widely, for example to advice services, Food banks and the Third Sector; a thousand in total were printed.
- Following a request from education, another leaflet was prepared for Family Support Officers to use, and training was also given to them.
- A Financial Inclusion Pathway has also been developed.
- A six-month, Infant Food Insecurity Pilot was also commenced on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December and was initially planned to run for 6 months. 60 supermarket gift vouchers, each to the value of £30 were purchased and placed across Health Visitor and Midwifery teams. These vouchers are sufficient for families with an infant to purchase 2 tins of baby formula when they are in crisis and the need is immediate and cannot quickly be met by other means. Third sector organisations can request a voucher for a family by contacting their Health Visiting or Midwifery team. The staff member dispensing the voucher must complete a basic information form.

The following information is being collated:

- What Area is covered by the team giving out the voucher?
- What is the basic family structure? (e.g. two parents, two young children.)
- What is the reason for the crisis? (e.g. benefits late)

No personal data is collected, and families are asked if they are happy for the basic data to be collected.

A leaflet is handed out with each voucher, explaining that this is a limited resource and part of a pilot study and giving information on where to seek advice on benefits etc. Referrals can be made to the Bute Advice Centre, ALlenergy and other services if families are agreeable to this happening. To date 10 vouchers have been given out, two by Midwives and 8 by Health Visitors. Factors contributing to the immediate crisis include no recourse to public funds, homelessness, parents on benefits and struggling to cope, sudden changes in circumstances, disability issues. The pilot will conclude in December, and a report of its findings made.

## 5. My Tribe Free Period Product Initiative.

My Tribe, Argyll and Bute's free period product initiative, plays a vital role in tackling child poverty by ensuring that no child misses out on education due to

lack of access to essential items. By providing free period products in over 150 community locations and through a user-friendly online ordering system that delivers directly to any household in Argyll and Bute, My Tribe helps ease financial pressures faced by families.

The initiative reaches children where they need it most—inside schools. Period products are made available in every secondary school and more than 30 primary schools across the region. Additionally, the My Tribe Champions initiative empowers students in several secondary schools to lead the conversation around period dignity, fostering awareness and peer support. Most young people access products through the My Tribe website, followed by availability in schools—ensuring discretion and convenience. Technical improvements to the platform have made it even easier for children and families to get the support they need, contributing to wider efforts to combat the effects of poverty on young people's wellbeing and education.

# D. Helping Families in Other Ways

#### 1. Public Health

### The Argyll and Bute Community Link Worker service

A Community Link Worker is a member of the wider GP practice team that can provide support and advice on many social issues that may be affecting health and wellbeing. They have a wide range of knowledge on local services and community-based groups and activities.

Community Link Workers can help people find the right support and provide them with information on a wide range of social issues that can impact on health and wellbeing, this might include:

- housing issues
- employment and learning
- support groups
- money worries
- physical activity
- long-term conditions
- caring for relatives and friends
- improving emotional wellbeing
- social isolation

The service helps to address child poverty in a number of ways including supporting families who are experiencing financial difficulties, supporting people with health and wellbeing challenges that may have an impact on their financial situation, and through the service being targeted at the areas of highest social deprivation and remote/rural isolation in Argyll and Bute.

Third Sector organisation 'With You' (previously We Are With You) has been commissioned by NHS Highland to provide the Community Link Worker service in Argyll and Bute since April 2022. Rachel McLean, the team lead for Community Link Workers in Argyll and Bute, introduces the service in the this video. Further information on the service is available from - Social prescribing | NHS Highland and from With You website Community Links Scotland | WithYou.

In 2024/2025, the service began an expansion process so that more people would be able to benefit from this support. This included the recruitment of three additional Community Link Workers and provision of the service to a further 9 GP practices. This takes the total number of GP practices with patients who can benefit from the service to 21. This year also saw an increase in the number of referrals to the service – an increase from 522 in 23/24 to 699 in 24/25.

The top reasons for referrals were mental health and wellbeing, financial advice, housing/essential needs, stress management and loneliness/social isolation.

Those who get support from the service are invited to complete a wellbeing questionnaire. 64% of people who accessed support from the service completed wellbeing data at the start and end of the service; 86.5% of whom showed an improvement in wellbeing.

Patients also provided feedback in the form of quotes:

"I was feeling frustrated by answers of others' to my housing problems, but [the CLW] instilled a confidence I thought I'd lost & was concise & professional in handling the housing issues I had."

'Definitely feel that having the link worker support me and help me find the correct resources has made a huge difference and achieved so much. I am very grateful for the time, effort and compassion that was shown to me and I feel like a lot of people would really benefit from the same experience I had."

# **Money Counts training**

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

anyone from health, education and social care staff; 3rd sector workers and volunteers; warm place volunteers and anyone who may be able to start a brief conversation about money worries. The session aims to:

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

The session helps to promote the Argyll and Bute Worrying about Money leaflet and are delivered jointly by Argyll and Bute and NHS highland

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

# **Argyll and Bute - Worrying About Money?**

As well as in English, this leaflet is now available in Gaelic, Ukrainian, Polish and Arabic versions and all are available to download from the website link above. These leaflets are regularly promoted and distributed throughout Argyll and Bute.

In 2024/2025, 5 Money Counts courses were delivered to 33 attendees.

# **Living Well grants**

In 2024-2025, Argyll and Bute HSCP Public Health team administered £23,000 of grants focused on improving health and wellbeing in rural island communities through 'connecting people to community activities.' The aims of the grant programme were:

- Connecting people in communities to the right support.
- Raise awareness of support available within local communities.
- Developing community support for local health, wellbeing and social issues, using collective knowledge, skills or resources within the community.

This fund sought to build capacity within communities for social prescribing, which may often involve addressing child poverty through the same routes as Community Link Workers – i.e. linking people experiencing hardship to support available within both statutory and community services.

### **Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships**

In April 2023, the Scottish Government made funding available to develop Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHP's) in Argyll and Bute. WAHP's provide access to money and welfare rights advice in health care settings. This is achieved

by embedding welfare advice specialists in healthcare settings through partnership working between local authorities, health boards and GP practices.

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

WAHP's provide GP practices with welfare advice specialists who can support patients to improve their financial situation. This initiative aims to address financial insecurity for individuals who may not seek support from other means of welfare advice. Funding was allocated to Argyll and Bute Council for additional resource for welfare advice specialists, for a 2-year remote and rural pilot for five GP practices.

From the start of the initiative in April 2023 to March 2025 the service has had 181 referrals across the five GP practices. Of the patients referred to Welfare rights 47% clients were over 65 years of age and 84% clients had a health condition. The total financial gain from Welfare Rights Intervention for this period was **£693,190**. The initiative has recently been extended for a further year from 01/04/2025 - 31/03/2026.

The pilot has been evaluated on behalf of the Scottish Ministers by the Improvement Service in collaboration with the Scottish Public Health Network. Welfare and Health Partnerships 'Test and Learn' Programme Evaluation

# 2. Young Carers

Throughout Argyll & Bute Young Carers are supported in their caring roles to access Young Carer Support from a range of commissioned third sector services; Crossroads Caring for Carers Cowal & Bute, Helensburgh & Lomond Carers Centre, Mid Argyll Youth Development Services (MAYDS) and North Argyll Carers Centre. These supports ensure that Young Carers are able to access Young Carers Statements, developing an action plan of support to meet individual need. Carers Centres and MAYDS can often be in the position to support Young Carers and their families to assist in times of financial need, for example with access to Benefit Advice, AliEnergy, additional funding, Young Scot's Young Carers Package, Young Carer Grant and referrals and signposting to a range of organisations. With systems in place, Young Carers are known to our education colleagues, who in turn can ensure referrals and access to Young Carer support, working closely with the services listed above. Providing space and time for Young Carer Support Workers to visit the schools, provide drop in's, one to one sessions and attend community events in support of Young Carers.

Young Carers in Argyll & Bute have been active participants in Argyll & Bute's Children's Rights illustration, Child Poverty illustration, Youth Voice and in producing a Young Carers and Children's Rights in Argyll & Bute animation.

Working with colleagues we are able to ensure that appropriate and accessible information is shared with Young Carers and their families, such as access to the Argyll & Bute Unpaid Carers Consultation, opportunities for Young Carers as well as Benefit advice, Young Carers Action Day, Carers Week and Carers Rights.

# 3. Working with Refugees in Argyll and Bute

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

Work with Ukrainian families is different as it is community based but still resettlement led. Support remains multi-agency and person centred. Some 300 plus Ukrainian citizens have been welcomed to Argyll and Bute.

The Council's Resettlement Team provide support for Ukrainians and this has included:

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

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

Since the start of 2024, Afghan families have been resettled in Helensburgh through the Afghan Resettlement Programme. All those who are resettled through ARP scheme benefit from full rights and entitlements through Indefinite Leave to Remain, providing them with the certainty and stability they need to rebuild their life here. The local authority receives integration tariffs over 3 years to provide ongoing integration support. As per all resettlement schemes, support is person centred and multiagency.

In autumn of 2023 we also reviewed our programme of support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people (UASC). These young people have made their way to the UK without parents or guardians and are seeking refugee status from the Home Office. Our new programme of support sees Resettlement and Social Work working together very closely to provide the best possible support for our young people.

# 4. Pre-loved School Uniform Project

The two-year funded pre-loved school uniform project has come to an end. The project was set up to focus on the reuse of good quality preloved school uniform and the recycling of uniforms that are no longer fit for purpose. Working with schools, community groups, and parent councils across all seven of our main settlements to support Eco-friendly reuse school uniform schemes that cover school uniform for Early Learning Centres, Nurseries Primary and Secondary Schools linked to each school cluster. We investigated, supported and promoted the taking donations of uniform from parents and pupils, ways to launder them and methods of redistributing them as and when they are required.

The project has achieved many of the goals we envisaged and many more that developed during the project in a positive and meaningful way. It also highlighted that more work is needed to keep this momentum moving forward. Much of the work and schemes that are now running will continue into the future, but the work has shown that with a little support and encouragement much more could be achieved.

Here is a link to a Council web page that will give you details of the project report. School uniform scheme | Argyll and Bute Council

# 5. Schools Share and Recycle

- Rothesay Academy have a school "shop" where pupils can access not just school
  uniform items but also Christmas jumpers so that they can be used again, and
  everyone take part in Christmas jumper events. They also have a "shop" where
  pupils can access formal wear for the school's Christmas Dance the biggest
  event in the school year that replaces a Prom.
- Gigha Primary school have a community fridge, which they keep fully stocked with fresh items of food. They have been very surprised at the uptake and need to restock very regularly.
- Dalmally Primary School are actively involved with the charity Mary's Meals –
  founded in Dalmally. Pupils fundraise and raise awareness. Most of our schools
  have a Uniform Bank where pupils can access pre-owned items of school
  uniform. Some extend this to items such as socks and tights.

 Quote from RRSA Silver report for Garelochhead Primary: Children spoke confidently about their involvement and opportunities to participate in many school groups such as House Teams and Garelochhead Guardians. Parents spoke of how proud their children were to belong to these groups. Pupils, staff and parents spoke of the Uniform Swap Shop, with children learning that not everything needs to be bought new. One parent commented, "As a parent, I find that really helpful."

#### 6. Street Connect



Street Connect is a charity that began in Glasgow in 2013. In Argyll and Bute, it is currently working in Dunoon and hopes to extend its activities to Rothsay shortly. It aims to support individuals struggling with addiction and associated issues such as homelessness and poor mental health. In Dunoon it hands out leaflets and runs a drop in café. On Tuesdays it offers a Support Group and can provide some one-to-one support if needed. People can self-refer, and the charity also receives referrals from churches, professionals and prison welfare.

#### E. Other Planned Work

# **Establishing a Dedicated Poverty Prevention Service**

Work is currently going on looking to establish a dedicated, multi-skilled Poverty Prevention Team within Argyll and Bute Council to coordinate and deliver early intervention strategies aimed at mitigating poverty across the local authority area. The team will provide a strategic, long-term approach to reducing reliance on crisis services and improving life outcomes for residents, building financial resilience and family prosperity. It will look to:

- Bring departments and roles together to create a unified strategic framework.
- Coordinate funds and try to avoid short term, fragmented funding on key areas increasing impact and sustainability.
- Avoid duplication, missed opportunities for early intervention and achieve savings.

#### **Key Elements of this change will be:**

- Core multi-skilled team: Including expertise in welfare rights, housing support, employability, education, and community engagement.
- Dedicated budget: Reducing reliance on short-term grants and ensuring service sustainability.
- Coordinated strategy: Unifying current efforts and aligning with local and national priorities.
- Integrated data use: Identifying at-risk households early and enabling targeted, effective intervention.
- Partnership governance: Involving key stakeholders in health, education, social care, housing, and the third sector.

# **Alignment with National and Local Priorities**

This proposal supports key local and national priorities, including:

- Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy and Action Plan
  - "People" (p.10) and "Prosperity" (p.22): Focusing on inclusive growth and wellbeing.
- Community Wealth Building (CWB):

Aligns with the principles promoted by CLES and supports anticipated duties under the CWB Bill.

- Argyll and Bute Climate Action Strategy
  - Contributes to climate justice through fairer access to energy support, transport, and sustainable food systems (p.29).
- Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan and Public Health Priorities:

Proactive, partnership-based work to prevent poverty and reduce health inequalities

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# **Action For Children** (9)

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