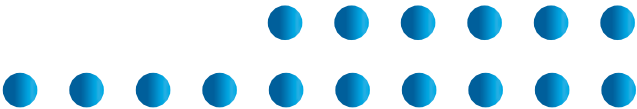


2023-2024 :::::.....

Argyll & Bute Child Poverty
Action Plan Review



Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2023-2024

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Foreword

As we present our Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2023-2024, we look back on a year that has seen upheaval and challenges. War in the Ukraine and Palestine has placed children in the middle of dangerous and traumatic events. Haiti, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories are the countries with the highest levels of hunger. Climate change has also contributed to a number of destructive natural events. All of these impact on our economy and how we view the World around us. This is particularly the case for our children, many of whom are still recovering from the impacts of covid19 and lockdown. We recognise that we need to work alongside them to make positive change and plan for the future.

Child poverty is a keystone issue across Argyll and Bute. Our vision for a successful, vibrant Argyll and Bute with a growing population and a thriving economy, and our Health and Social Care aim that people live longer, healthier, independent lives will not be met in a context where children are disadvantaged. Early life chances are strongly correlated with lifetime achievement and health. Adverse childhood experiences correlate with poor health outcomes and social harms for the individual and wider society. Our children today are the future of Argyll and Bute.

New statistics published on 6th June 2024 state that more than one in four children remain in relative poverty in over half of Scotland's new Westminster constituencies. The statistics, produced by Loughborough University for the End Child Poverty Coalition show that child poverty rates vary across Scotland and that Argyll and Bute saw a small increase of 2.8% to 23.5%; below the Scottish average of 24% and the UK average of 30%. The report concludes that reducing child poverty in local areas will rely not only on targeted action but also action at a national level.

Whilst we only have a limited ability to affect change at a national level, we continue to believe that it is paramount that action is taken at the local level. This means not only tackling the three drivers of poverty (income through employments, income through benefits and the cost of living), but looking at the impacts of poverty and working to reduce those harms.

This year Argyll and Bute became the first Council in Scotland to declare a housing emergency in June 2023, to be followed by other Councils and, eventually the Scottish Government itself. In October 2023, the Council launched two surveys asking for views on housing from the community and businesses. In total, the Council received 688 responses to the community and 72 responses to the workforce survey, indicating that most of the respondents (92%) felt their communities were negatively impacted by the housing shortage. A Housing Emergency Summit was held in November 2023, bringing together 90 partners from public, private, third and community sectors who pledged their support to take decisive and bold action to address the housing emergency.

In Argyll and Bute we work with our communities and try to ensure that everyone's voice is heard. We are delighted that United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act is now law and will help to ensure children have a voice.

[the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#)

Engagement with communities, including children and young people across Argyll and Bute have indicated that: Transport Infrastructure, Housing and Community Wellbeing were the three areas considered to be the most important. Going forward it is our strategy to concentrate on these areas and they will be key in our new Outcome Improvement Plan.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/ABOIP%202024-2034.pdf>

Our Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2023-2024 showcases some of the work of key organisations, both statutory and third sector, across Argyll and Bute, to tackle child poverty. We applaud their work and the work of our communities and our incredible staff who look to support, advise and empower people who are experiencing the impacts and costs of poverty.



Evan Beswick

Evan Beswick
Chief Officer (Interim)
Argyll & Bute Health &
Social Care Partnership
Chair, Strategic
Children's Group



Pippa Milne

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Chief Executive
Argyll and Bute
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Fiona Davies

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Introduction

Reasons for the Review

In 2017 the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act came into force as an attempt to put in place measures that would reduce the concerning increase in child poverty, both on a national and local level. To evidence the need for such action the Scottish Government commissioned research which found that by 2030/31, if no action was taken, it was estimated that 38% of children would be in relative poverty, 32% of children would be in absolute poverty, 17% of children would be in combined low income and material deprivation and 16% of children would be in persistent poverty.

The 2017 Act set four targets relating to ending child poverty, which the Scottish Government committed to trying to achieve by 2023 - 24 and 2030; these are all measured after housing costs are deducted. The targets for 2023 - 24 are:

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

Targets for 2030 are:

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

Despite having a national child poverty rate of (24%), below the UK average (30%), it currently appears unlikely that targets will be met. However recent figures do not yet fully reflect the impact of measures such as the Scottish Child Payment. It is clear that considerable action needs to be taken both on a national and local level to make a real and lasting impact on the level of child poverty.

Our Vision

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

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

Poverty is often characterised by exclusion; Sociologist Peter Townsend said this means being unable to access “those diets, amenities, standards, services and activities which are common or customary in society.” We therefore believe that

relative poverty, which calculates whether households are below 60% of the contemporary median, is a useful indicator of current living standards.

Figures published by the Scottish Government on 21st March 2024, show that relative and absolute child poverty fell between 1994/95, when data collection began, and 2011/12. Since then, relative child poverty gradually increased a little for a few years, but in recent years, both relative and absolute child poverty have shown little change at a level higher than the targets. Child material deprivation has been measured since 2004 and persistent poverty since 2010. Material deprivation has changed very little at a level slightly higher than the interim target and, persistent child poverty has remained broadly stable.

In Argyll and Bute, looking at the issue of child poverty in remote, rural and island places is key. The Scottish Government's report, 'Poverty in Rural Scotland' published in December 2021 states that that living expenses for those living in rural and island areas in Scotland are higher than for those living in other geography types.

The Poverty Alliance Report: Inquiry into Poverty in Rural Scotland; Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Poverty; May 2024, found that there is a complexity and interconnectivity of a range of policy problems facing rural Scotland generally. All of these create challenges for those in rural communities who are on low incomes or at risk of poverty.

Common threads in submissions received were:

- The additional cost of living faced by rural communities is a distinctive feature of rural poverty and is not currently reflected in general policy or in anti-poverty policy;
- The two most significant drivers of additional costs are transport and energy;
- Cost of living pressures combined with the challenges of geography create additional barriers to accessing public services and we heard that access to childcare rurally is a particular concern.

The Report also said:

For people living in rural Scotland, transport is the most significant additional cost compared to people living in urban areas, amounting to an additional £50 per week.

Research was conducted on the [Minimum Income Standard in Rural Scotland in 2016](#) and more recently [updated in 2020/21](#) in relation to understanding fuel poverty. This research found that.

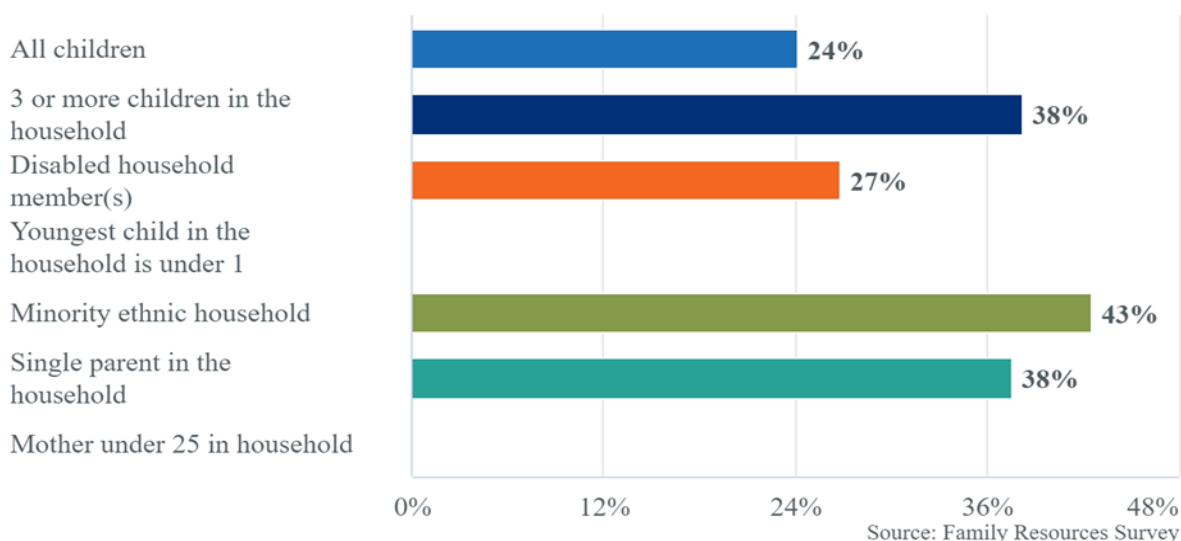
- The budgets that households need to achieve a minimum acceptable living standard in remote rural Scotland are typically 10-40 per cent higher than elsewhere in the UK.

- These premiums are most modest for pensioners and greatest for single people and families supporting children.
- For households living in the most remote island locations, too far from towns to make regular shopping trips and those relying on heating oil in older homes, additional costs can be even greater than 40 per cent.

When looking at child poverty we can also see that certain priority groups also continue to be at a higher risk of poverty, wherever they reside.

Figure 9: Children in some priority groups have a higher risk of being in relative poverty

Proportion of children in relative poverty after housing cost, Scotland 2020-23



A bar chart showing what groups are most at risk of poverty

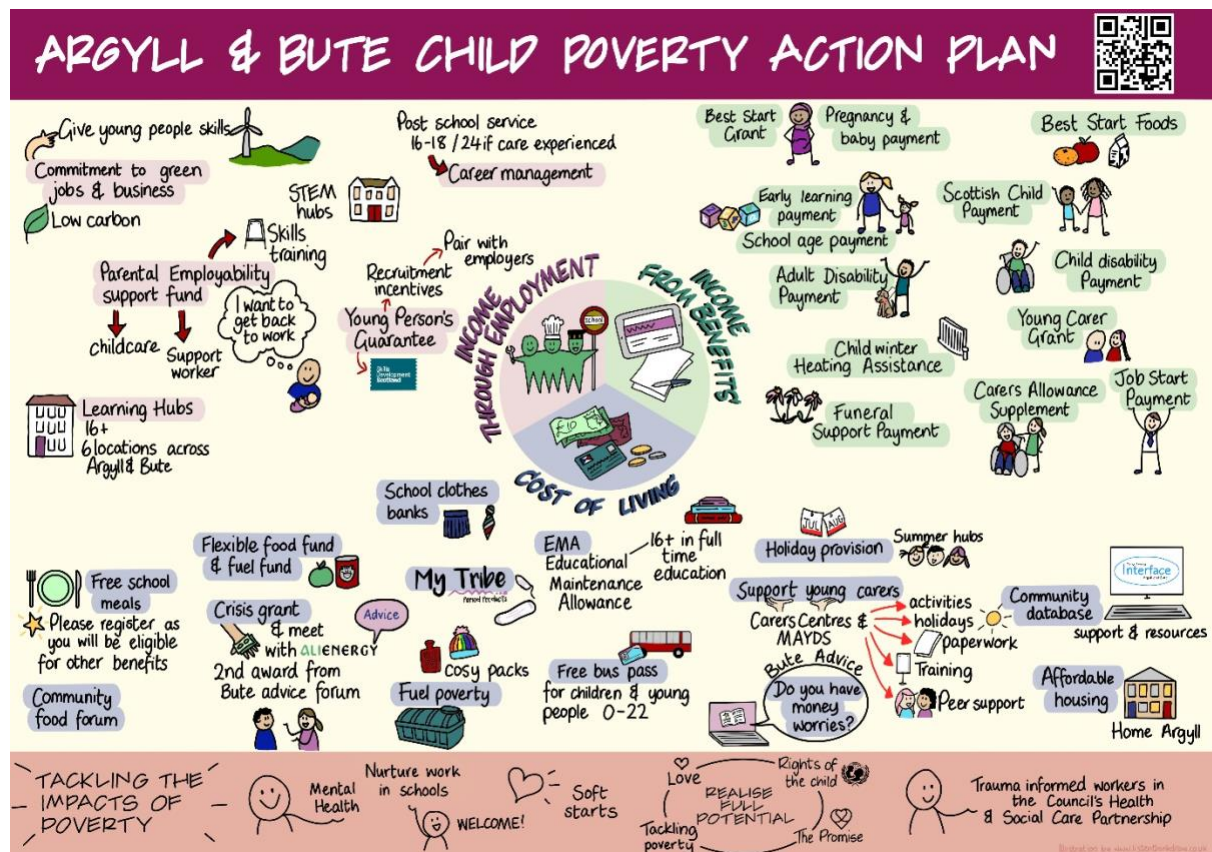
We have found that the following actions are key to creating change and tackling child poverty across Argyll and Bute.

- We need to listen to what people are telling us about what matters to them and what needs to change. Key issues raised here would include transport, energy costs and the cost of living premium paid by those living in remote, rural and island places.
- Developing effective data that will allow us to identify those requiring support and focus resources on them.
- Working together to make the most of our resources and identify new opportunities, like the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund. Identifying what works and where the gaps are. Statutory must work with third sector and value each other.
- Signposting service users to other agencies and promoting a “no wrong door approach”.

- Advice services are key to ensuring that people get what they are entitled to and are visible when they are in difficulty and require help.
- Training for staff is important, both to help them understand poverty and how to support people. An example of this is the Money Counts training that is available across Highland and Argyll and Bute.

Engagement and Listening

This year consultation and co-production has been going on with children and young people in relation to key issues like children's rights and child poverty. This has included talking to children and young people in schools and other key groups like Youth Voice and Young Carers. With child poverty we have been asking them about the child friendly "Plan on a page" and their ideas for other things we might do.



A graphic version of the Child Poverty Action Plan.

Pupils from Dalintober Primary School, Parkland School, Hermitage Academy and the Youth Voice Group that included Rothesay JC, Oban HS & Campbeltown GS said:

Likes

They liked the way the plan is laid out and the colours it comes in, including the way colours are used. They approved of the way it was laid out into sections and the fact

that it could be broken into those sections for separate use. They felt that this was a better way for children and young people to access the child poverty plan. They thought the text on the My Tribe bit was too small.

Things That Are Happening That They Liked:

- Child disability payments is important,
- Food banks,
- School clothing banks,
- School Lunches,
- Breakfast Clubs.

Things They Would Like to See:

- Health e.g. prescriptions minor ailments service
- Services for young people in the community – perhaps around mental health
- They would like to see free school lunches for P1-7
- Money for school lunch doesn't allow people to have a snack. It would be good to support snacks
- Personal hygiene stands or packs that could be in school for young people to access such as soaps, toothpaste, shower gel etc.
- Resource exchange in schools where course books could be handed in, pencils etc.
- Some schools have book fairs and combine this with a book swap/book donations
- Keeping you house warm
- Out of school check-in in opportunities.

These ideas and views help us to know what is working and where there are gaps that are felt by children, young people and their families. In the coming year these ideas will be looked at with a view to seeing what can be developed and taken forward. Children and young people will be involved in this process.

Taking Action on Rural Poverty

Taking Action on Rural Poverty is a three year project led by the Poverty Alliance and funded by the Robertson Trust. It runs from September 2023 – August 2026. In Argyll and Bute it is led by Becky Hothersall, Development Officer. The Council and the Third Sector Interface forms a key part of an oversight group with the Poverty Alliance to oversee progress of the TARP Project. The Council will share learning through its multi-agency Financial Inclusion and Advice Group and other channels and will seek to embed TARP's findings in its work.

The core aim of TARP is to develop new ways of addressing rural poverty in Scotland by reducing the rural poverty premium – the extra costs that people living

on a low income and in a rural area incur when accessing goods and services. To help address the root causes of the rural poverty premium and deliver sustainable, long-term change.

To deliver this aim, the project has the following objectives:

1. To support people with direct experience of poverty and trauma, community and voluntary organisations, the private sector and public bodies to collaborate to address the poverty premium.
2. Connections and collaboration between rural orgs are increased and strengthened as community and voluntary organisations are supported to network and undertake anti-poverty advocacy work.
3. Learning about change in taking a participatory approach to tackling the rural poverty premium.

With an assets-based and trauma-informed approach, the project will build on the strengths of stakeholders in rural communities to create new responses to poverty in Scotland. There are five activity areas:

1. Engagement of people with experience of poverty and trauma
2. Networking and advocacy activities
3. Test of change pilots
4. Evidence on Rural Poverty
5. Learning about change

The Theory of Change is that by working with local people and partners TARP will identify practical changes that can reduce the rural poverty premium. The Poverty Alliance will advocate with others for the local and national change that supports that reduction.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

The Argyll and Bute Implementation Group received monies from the UNCRC Innovations Fund for a number of events that will bring children and young people together to learn more about their rights and celebrate the new act bringing those rights into law. Some events, connecting rights to events or activities, have already taken place, for example a rural sports day involving 6 primary schools at Rhunahaorine Primary School and Tighnabruaich Primary School ran a community event looking at Cleaner Seas. Others are planned including an LGBTQ day of workshops and celebration. In addition children and young people are coproducing awards and events to help staff understand children's rights and others are working with a graphic artist to design a graphic version of our children's Rights Plan.

Transport and Poverty

In its briefing: “Transport Poverty a Public Health Issue” 2024, Public Health Scotland said that:

Transport is essential for our health. It is one of the building blocks of good health and wellbeing and enables access to the other building blocks. Sustainable transport not only provides access to the building blocks of good health but also provides opportunities for physical activity and reduces the harms to health from motorised vehicles. These include pollution, road traffic collisions, community severance and greenhouse gases, which are responsible for global warming and climate change. Not everyone has the same transport options. Transport poverty, the term used to describe the lack of transport options, has important health and social implications because it means not everyone has equal access to the building blocks of good health.

This document goes on to suggest that the 5 dimensions of transport poverty can be seen as: Safe; available, reliable, affordable and accessible.

Transport poverty has been identified as contributing to child poverty and this is particularly the case in local authorities that have remote, rural and island places. The report, “Inquiry into Poverty in Rural Scotland”, May 2024, by the Poverty Alliance and a cross party group in the Scottish Parliament on poverty noted that:

For people living in rural Scotland, transport is the most significant additional cost compared to people living in urban areas, amounting to an additional £50 per week. The submissions we received highlighted transport as a significant issue in rural Scotland, particularly for those living on low incomes.

Argyll and Bute has both, including 23 populated islands; along with this it has five small towns that are spread widely over an area of 690, 946 hectares and is, geographically, the second largest local authority area in Scotland. Argyll and Bute has the fourth sparsest population of the 32 local authorities, with an area population density of 0.12 persons per hectare. This compares to a Scottish average of 0.70 persons per hectare (Mid-2021 Population Estimates). There are 2,583 km (1,617 miles) of roads in Argyll and Bute, 4.5% of Scotland’s total road network (Scottish Transport Statistics 2021). Spending on car fuel is higher in rural areas. Around 50% of rural residents spend over £100 a month on fuel compared with 39% of people in the rest of Scotland. (Scot. Gov. Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021).

Ferries play a crucial role in transport within Argyll and Bute and hence cost changes, weather, cancellations and breakdowns are factors that can make planning journeys problematic. Cost and unreliability can add to the challenges around setting up and running businesses, recruiting and getting materials in, and finished products out. Hence Argyll and Bute, whilst it has a higher than average number of self-employed people, it does not have an industrial base; Argyll and Bute’s economy is predominantly service-based. The Council and the Health Board are amongst the biggest employees, along with Forestry, Tourism, Farming and Fisheries.

Over 87% of employee jobs in the area are provided within the service sector (Office Business Register and Employment Survey 2018). Argyll and Bute has relatively high levels of employment in agriculture and fishing, and low levels of employment in manufacturing and finance. Unemployment rates in Argyll and Bute are below the national average. However more employment is seasonal and in low paid areas such as the Tourist sector.

Service industries employ a larger percentage of women and this will have particular impact on single parent families which are more likely to be led by women; the gender pay gap adds to this factor. The costs of travel and perhaps the need to own a car can be particularly difficult for single parent families in remote, rural and island places.

The Scottish Government has recognised that special challenges faced by local authorities that are, or have, island places and has set up the Islands Transport Forum, delivered as a standing agenda item at the Islands Strategic Group (ISG), and chaired by the Minister for Transport.

The remit of the Forum is to consider strategic transport issues affecting Scotland's islands. The purpose is to facilitate proactive engagement and collaboration on supporting island resilience and to enable a more strategic, partnership approach to improving the economic, social, and cultural development of islands in relation to transport.

In October 2023 the Islands Transport Forum identified key areas for discussion:

- Local authority operated ferry services;
- The lack of resilience in the ferry network and current maintenance issues;
- The significant impact of tourism on the transport network;
- Reduction of usage of air service due to declining population and reduced use for NHS;
- Concern over current level of Loganair service and long term viability as company is up for sale;
- Rural public transport services.

The Scottish government and the Islands Strategic Group recognise that food and fuel costs are normally higher on islands due to transport issues and that this has been exacerbated further by the cost of living crisis. In 2023 Scottish Government has provided an additional £1 million in the current financial year to be delivered through the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund to support islanders facing high fuel, food and energy costs in order to help meet cost of living pressures. This funding builds on the 2022/23 £1.4 million Island Cost Crisis Emergency Fund, which was developed specifically to recognise and tackle the challenges faced by island communities. Measures such as the Fuel Insecurity Fund and the Winter Heating Payment offered some support for those experiencing fuel poverty on our islands where older, poorly insulated housing stock is a factor.

“Engagement and consultation across Argyll and Bute has shown that people are concerned about transport issues and want them to be considered a priority. In 2023 Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership consulted on its next Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) which will be a ten year plan running from 2024 to 2034. A group supporting young people with a disability worked with the Community Development Team to adapt the consultation to be suitable for them. 18 youth groups were contacted and there was a high level of response to requests to engage using a pictographic survey form. Schools also took part. Over 40 community groups also participated and participants were asked to give their views and to consider 7 themes and choose 3 which they thought should be the top priorities in the plan; they could also choose to add their own 3 choices. The themes were drawn from community planning partners’ strategic plans and through recent community engagement exercises conducted during and immediately prior to the onset of the pandemic. Those suggested were: Climate Change, Community Wellbeing, Digital Inclusion, Diverse Economy and Skilled Workforce, Financial Inclusion, Housing and Transport Infrastructure.

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

- Transport Infrastructure,
- Housing,
- Community Wellbeing.

In addition, feedback from staff from **Young Carers Centres** in Argyll and Bute demonstrate the difficulties caused by transport challenges in rural areas and how they impact on the lives of children, young people and their families.

We have a few families that want to attend clubs / trips etc. to have respite / support but we are struggling to find a solution in how to support them with this. The local buses don't run at suitable times, parents are unable to bring them in and out to clubs for various reasons – no transport, poor mental health, family commitments etc. We have tried one of the 2 local taxis, the first - the lady only runs it herself and is unable to commit to regular pickups, the second we have not yet been able to have a discussion with.

Mid Argyll Youth Development Service (MAYDS) don't have enough staff to commit weekly as well as the fact we have young people over quite a wide area that are having difficulties attending due to transport. These areas are Lochgilphead, Ardrishaig, Tarbert and Kilmichael Glassary and then with any respite trips there would be difficulties as far down as Kintyre area.

I am aware that transport causes difficulty in other areas for children/young people/families in accessing opportunities for clubs/groups/respite/leisure

The importance of transport costs and other issues to people was also highlighted this year by early discussions of the Poverty Alliance’s Cost of Rural Living Panel in

Argyll and Bute, as part of their **Taking Action on Rural Poverty Project**. Panel members all have experience of living on a low or unstable income, or of high costs related to living in a rural area. They are exploring the key issues affecting their costs of living and the kinds of practical change that could help. Some of the key emerging issues across the themes of costs, barriers and solutions include:

1. Issues related to the cost of transport

- High cost of transport in rural Scotland limits access.
- Knock-on impact of longer travel times, for example, requiring childcare for longer periods.
- Travel costs from islands to mainland to work.
- Irregular train services necessitates spending money being out all day - extra costs of food/somewhere to go.
- No Young Scot discount on ferries, [N.B. extension of the National Ferry Concessionary Scheme to under 22-year-old island residents has recently been announced as part of the Fair Fares Review].
- Costs relating to travelling by car including upfront cost of buying a car, petrol costs, high distances to travel to get cars repaired, and the high cost of insuring a car for younger people.
- Car transport on ferries expensive.
- Issues were also raised about transport in the context of access to healthcare, including the cost of travelling to appointments, particularly when they are scheduled long distances from home (for example, an appointment being in Paisley when it could have been in Oban).
- Cost of transport limiting access to food and other essentials, including the cost of extra travel to access cheaper shops, Halal meat or allergen-free food.

2. Wider Transport Barriers

- Timetable limitations create issues. For example the bus and train between Oban-Taynuilt leave at same time, resulting in half as many options.
- Issues related to service limitations including no busses on a Sunday and limited services during school holidays.
- Individuals in remote areas highlighting absence of any services in their area, necessitating access to a car.
- Lack of service linking main towns (e.g., Dunoon and Helensburgh).
- Surcharges on deliveries are common and some companies will not deliver goods to parts of Argyll and Bute, resulting in greater need to travel).
- If roads are closed (e.g. after landslips) some communities may have no access to food.

3. What change would we want to see?

Additional services or options

- More services/options, including increasing the number of buses.
- Add new public transport routes.
- Car sharing/car pool (short hires).
- More competition to provide services.

Subsidies

- Unpaid carers should be able to access NEC bus pass; reduced taxi rates.
- Discounted ferry travel for residents.
- Discounted fuel for rural areas.
- Make electric vehicles more affordable for people living in rural areas.

Healthcare-related

- Video calls with consultants rather than a 6 hour round trip for a 10 min appointment – avoid need for transport.
- Awareness within hospital systems of where people live - scheduling appointments to allow travel, or checking whether can be done locally.
- More help for hospital appointments - some available: transport volunteers, ambulance pick up etc. but always gaps (early appointments at weekends). (People often wait years for these appointments).

Good examples – what helps?

- NearMe (virtual health appointments) work really well where appropriate - but could be communicated better.
- Free bus passes make a huge difference for over-60s.
- Local initiatives such as the Dalavich WhatsApp group for lift sharing.
- Community transport volunteers and Patient Transport Service for healthcare appointments, where available.

These are points raised in initial discussions; the panel will further explore transport and other issues and determine their priorities for local change. These emerging priorities will be used to help select a practical intervention or “test of change” and evaluate its impact on reducing the rural poverty premium. As the group’s capacity and confidence grows, Taking Action on Rural Poverty will also look for and support a range of ways to connect people with lived experience to strengthen local decision making.

The Third Sector is playing a role in identifying and working to address transport issues. **The Oban, Lorne and Isles Living Well Network** identified the following actions:

- Emergency Car spaces on Calmac ferries. There is currently a pilot scheme on the Coll / Tiree route with 10% of car spaces being held back until 7 days before a sailing.
- Near Me equipment has now been purchased for the Tiree, Coll and Iona communities.

It was stated that a Network priority was Patient and Community Transport and that they would continue to collect a list of transport challenges faced by people across Oban, Lorne and the Isles. At a working Group meeting on 20/06/2023, the following were agreed to be the main challenges across Oban, Lorne and the Islands:

- Timing of appointments in Glasgow or elsewhere;
- Patient Transport Bookings;
- Lower numbers of volunteers for third sector transport schemes;
- Challenges with raising funds for third sector transport schemes;
- Lack of a Dial a Ride or Ring and Ride service for Oban and surrounding areas;
- Expense of attending repeated appointments including accommodation, food, loss of earnings.

In May 2024 Argyll and Bute Council responded to Scottish Government's Islands connectivity Plan; they stated that Investment (in island transport) must be prioritised to ensure that essential core services are provided to all communities.

This is just one of the points made by Argyll and Bute Council in its official response to the Scottish Government's Public Consultation for Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP), which sets out a long-term vision of how ferry services, supported by other transport modes, will be delivered and improved in the future.

As part of its response, the council also included the following key principles:

- Future ferry services must be promoted on the basis they are affordable, reliable, and sustainable and offer a high-quality service that integrates with other transport links.
- Communities should have a greater say in the development of timetables.
- Lifeline services should be funded with a clear identification of future needs. Services must be future-proofed to allow the full economic potential to be realised over time, and to ensure that any increase in fares does not adversely impact the economy.
- Funding, fares and subsidy – funding of transport infrastructure and services is a key barrier. Without adequate funding, we will see a continued contraction of rural public transport services.
- Whilst the concept in principle for fixed links is welcome, more clarity is needed on this. The council is about to commence works to replace Craignure Pier and carry out associated shore side infrastructure, and a fixed link could have a large impact on this. A fixed link to Mull, whilst bringing opportunities,

would also have the potential to increase vehicular traffic on the existing 'fragile' road network.

- The council also highlighted the significantly important role that air services play in supporting fragile island communities and expressed the need for a national Scottish Air Services Review, similar to the Scottish Ferries Review.

As part of its strategy to combat rural transport issues, Argyll and Bute Council, in March 2024, allocated £8 million pounds to this year's roads' reconstruction programme, taking investment over the past 10 years to more than £80m. Using this investment to focus on stopping deterioration, and where possible improve road condition, has been a successful approach, according to an independent evaluation of Argyll and Bute roads. The proposed schemes have been identified through the council's Roads Asset database, and the information collected from a SCANNER survey that was carried out during the summer.

Another example of action taken to tackle transport issues is the "Transport-Active Travel Apps provided by the Council. This web page provides information on best ways to journey around Argyll and Bute and also combat climate change.

[Better journeys | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/better-journeys)

#The NHS in Argyll and Bute also recognise the need to support patients travelling from remote, rural and island places to appointments on the mainland and in Glasgow and elsewhere.

<https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/your-services/related-services-and-accessibility/travel-and-transport/financial-assistance-with-patient-travel/>

Information and support is given to arrange and book transport and accommodation. Where appropriate financial reimbursement is given for these costs. In extreme cases patients may apply for expenses up front i.e. accommodation costs. They are to submit the receipts to patient travel finance following their attendance at hospital. There are also local funds available i.e. bump to birth and Islay and Jura sick children's fund.

The NHS also use Near Me, online consultation and appointments to reduce the need for travel.

<https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/your-services/near-me/>

Data Programme Work

The ICT service's data programme has for some time been engaged in supporting the Health and Social Care Partnership's child poverty action plan. The general aim has been to help combine datasets both from within and outside the council to gain new insights on unmet financial need amongst A&B households. Over the past 6 months particular focus has been on the two specific work-streams described below.

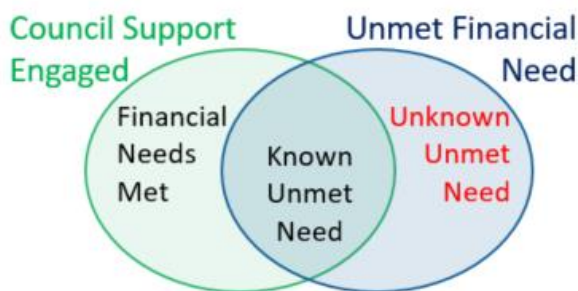
1. Assessing Usefulness of CACI Datasets

Background: in December 2023, in response to sign-posting by the Improvement Service, the HSCP and the Data Programme jointly made a bid for £17,000 from the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Action Fund for the purpose of assessing the usefulness of commercial datasets available from a supplier called CACI. This bid was successful and using the awarded funding in January 2024 delivery was taken of three CACI datasets, each with a 12 month license:

- a) CACI Paycheck Disposable Income – gives details of average household income and certain expenditures, e.g. housing costs, down to census Output Area (OA) level;
- b) CACI Acorn – gives demographic group classifications at postcode level;
- c) CACI Acorn Household – gives demographic classifications but at individual household level. It classifies each household into one of 57 demographic slices, which includes a financial dimension. For example, extracting from the Acorn Household documentation:

Household Type 52: Struggling Owner Occupier Families

These couples and single parents mostly live in small terraced or occasionally semi-detached houses, with typically 2 to 3 bedrooms. These properties are usually at the lower end of the market for the area and most of these families will be buying their home, although some may be renting from a private landlord. Sometimes the accommodation will be cramped for the size of family. Household incomes are generally around the average, so these families may be just coping financially.



The council's Welfare Rights Team already do fantastic work helping raise household income through benefit maximisation and lowering household costs, having achieved £4.45M in Client Financial Gain in 23/24. Their work is based on existing referral channels which help to address *known* unmet need. Our aim is to evaluate the usefulness of these CACI datasets when combined with other data to surface and address as yet *unknown* unmet need for households who have not yet reached out for support.

How then to surface *unknown* unmet need?

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is sometimes used by local authorities and HSCPs and can have value, but is widely acknowledged to be not quite granular enough. Taking for example the SIMD income ranks for data zones

(DZs) in Helensburgh and Rhu in Figure 1 below, with data zones listed on the left and mapped on the right.

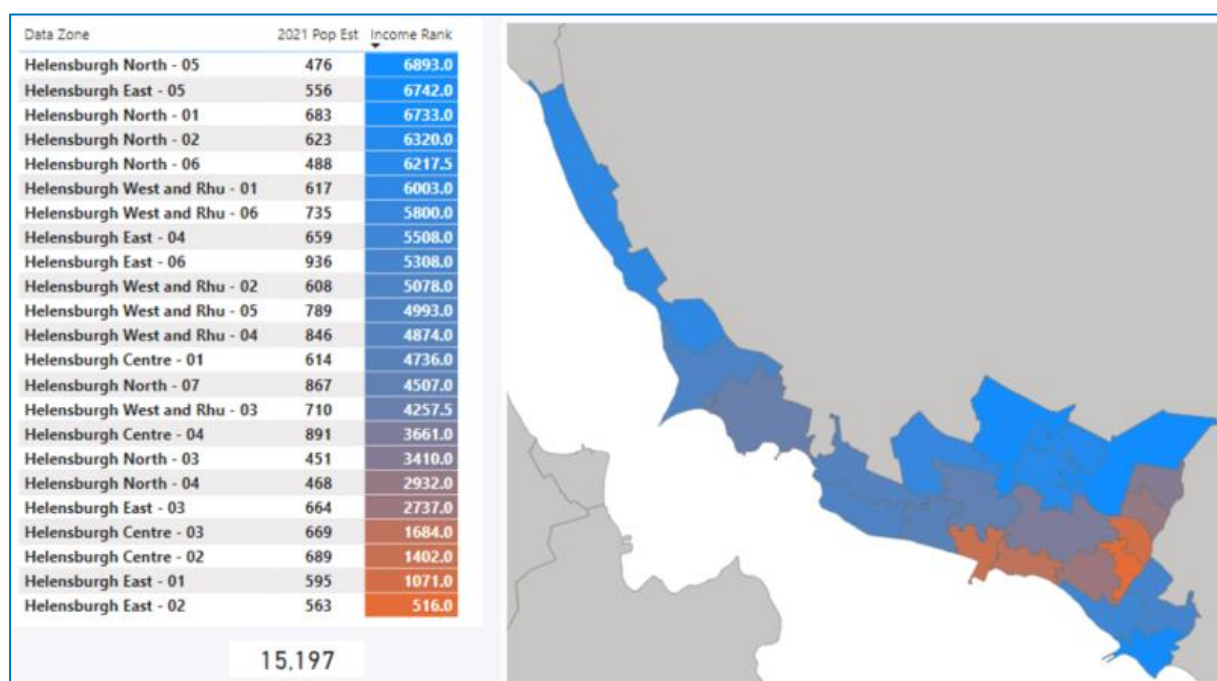


Figure 1: SIMD 2020v2 Income Rank for the 2011 Data Zone Helensburgh & Rhu – 06

A map showing Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Data Zones

At SIMD level 3 or 4 lower income data zones in orange stand out but the settlement, according to SIMD, looks relatively affluent. However, by combining SIMD and CACI Paycheck Disposable Income which is available at Census Output Area (OA) level, so more granular than DZ, in Figure 2 below we can see that within a relatively high-income-rank SIMD DZ (Helensburgh West & Rhu – 06) there is, according to CACI, an OA pocket of (relatively) lower income households.

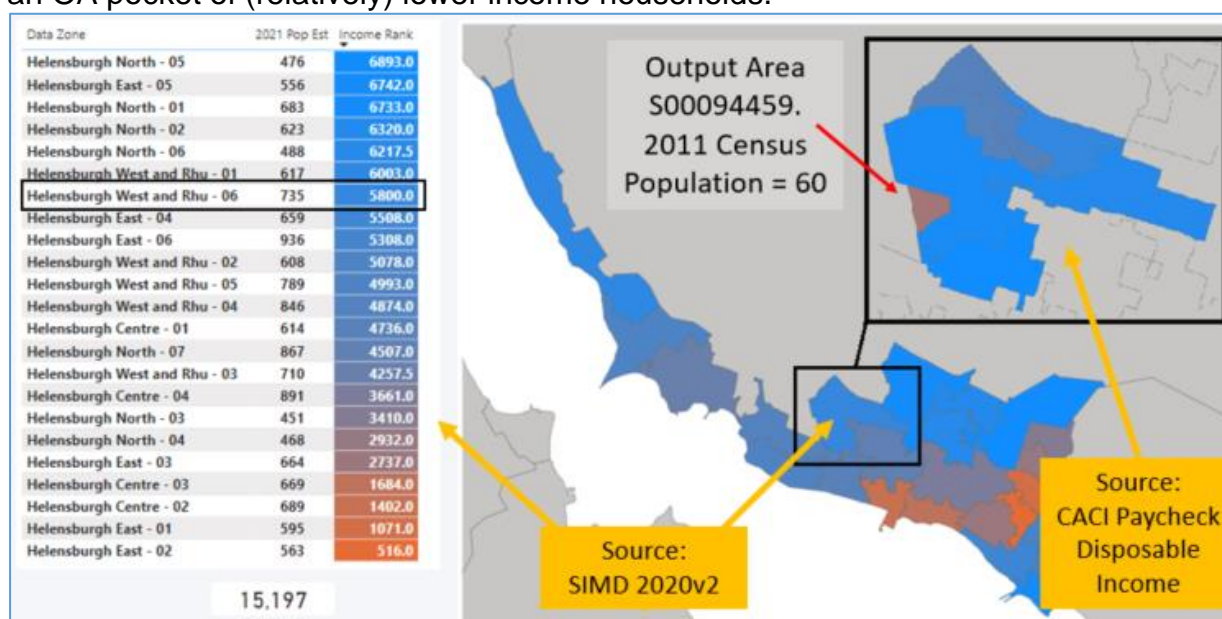


Figure 2: Comparing the Disposable Income of Output Areas within a Data Zone

This confirms what local awareness tells us, that given a DZ with a population of 735 people, having a single SIMD income rank for that DZ will “miss” smaller pockets within the DZ that are relatively less affluent, as shown above.

Can this approach be scaled? – Yes, we can use PowerBI to essentially repeat the process above for all 125 data zones in A&B. Note the difference between the green and red income figures below:


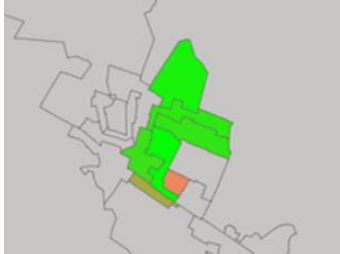
Data Zone: Knapdale 01	Data Zone: Lomond Shore 04
 <p>Households (2020 estimate): 385 SIMD Income Rank: 6,273 out of 6,976 SIMD Overall Decile: 7th</p> <p>Contains 7 Census Output Areas (OAs) on map, with maximum OA Mean Disposable Income according to CACI: £29,170 pa.</p> <p>OA marked orange on map: S00094049 Households: 60 (16% of the data zone total) CACI Household Mean Disposable Income = £13,590 pa.</p>	 <p>Households (2020 estimate): 336 SIMD Income Rank: 5,758 out of 6,976 SIMD Overall Decile: 8th</p> <p>Contains 7 Census Output Areas (OAs) on map, with maximum OA Mean Disposable Income according to CACI: £34,460 pa.</p> <p>OA marked orange on map: S00094339 Households: 48 (14% of the data zone total) CACI Household Mean Disposable Income = £19,790 pa.</p>

Table 1: Finding lower-income Output Areas within higher-income Data Zones

In summary, we believe the CACI Paycheck Disposable Income data will help better understand the financial pressures facing A&B communities at a greater level of detail than SIMD alone. That said, the CACI evaluation process has had mixed results when looking at other aspects of the data:

Questions asked of the CACI Data	Interim Conclusions from the Evaluation
Can we use the CACI data to explore average income in A&B communities at a level below SIMD Data Zones?	Yes , as demonstrated in table 1 above, it has potential to give insight at Census Output Area level.
Do CACI data on household costs reflect the island / remote rural uplift in living costs identified by Scottish Government?	No , CACI acknowledge that their statistical modelling of household income does not include rurality factors.
Given 6% of A&B properties are second homes , can the CACI data distinguish them from standard residential households?	No , CACI acknowledge that their datasets cannot distinguish occupancy type at this level.

Do the proportions of CACI housing costs , e.g. renters, mortgage payers, etc., look correct when compared with other data sources?	Partial. When compared to the Scottish Household Survey, the percentage of households indicated by CACI to be social renting look approximately correct, but the percentages for mortgage repayments and private renters look too low both for A&B and Scotland as a whole.
Do the demography classifications given by Acorn at household level appear accurate? (e.g. correctly identifying “struggling owner occupier families”, etc.)	Partial. It is clear that CACI do not have actual data on all UK households, rather they have representative data in certain communities from which they extrapolate those patterns to areas where they have little or no data. In somewhat homogenous urban areas this extrapolation can work, but in more heterogeneous rural areas the extrapolation appears to become less reliable.

Table 2: CACI Dataset Evaluation: Interim Conclusions.

Table 2 above is a summary of the questions we’ve asked of the CACI data and conclusions reached so far. Being able to understand average income levels in communities at a lower level than SIMD for data zones is an advantage, but beyond that the results, especially at household level, are mixed. The good news is CACI themselves have been active partners with us in the evaluation process and so we continue to draw their attention to anomalies found and they respond where they can.

Next steps – to be able to use the CACI data to make a difference for households we need to be able to use it to generate actionable insights for the Welfare Rights Team. We’re currently negotiating with our Education Service for them to share with us pupil UPRN (Unique Property Reference Numbers) from the Schools Education Management System (SEEMIS) so that we can look for schools where there are groupings of enrolled pupils living in these lower-income-OA-within-higher-income-DZ per the examples in Table 1. Information Governance makes it difficult to point the Welfare Rights Team to these households directly (although see work-stream 2 below), but if we can begin by identifying the schools where this is a factor then we can have them try and maximise benefit uptake at those schools as a priority. A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed to support this data sharing request and it’s currently being reviewed by Education.

2. Working with the Improvement Service (IS) and SAVVI on Gateways for Data Re-use.

With the aim of finding ways to re-use resident data collected for other purposes, e.g. council tax, to identify unmet need, the Improvement Service’s Rural and Island Child Poverty Support group engaged with an organisation called SAVVI (Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability). SAVVI have expertise in information governance and data protection legislation. Working together IS, SAVVI, Angus

Council, Inverclyde and ABC are lobbying the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) the DWP and SSS for permission through agreed legal gateways to re-use client data.

Specific datasets in scope for the SAVVI initiative are:

- a) Council's Revenue & Benefits data:
 - Crisis grant applications;
 - Council Tax Reduction claims;
 - Council Tax Arrears.
- b) National datasets:
 - DWP details of Universal Credit (UC) claims;
 - SSS details of Scottish Child Payment claims.

Through a series of workshops SAVVIs experts and the three councils' data protection officers have drafted five data re-use proposals for submission to the ICO covering the datasets above. The ICO are currently in the process of reviewing these proposals.

In the meantime SAVVI are continuing discussions with the Cabinet Office and DWP on how to progress requests around UC claims with them. Those discussions seem promising, with consideration being given to amending UK legislation to facilitate requests of this kind – although this wouldn't be effective until 2026. The Cabinet Office have also suggested an information session for the group on the Digital Economies Act 2017 and how we might use it in the meantime.

IS have also been in discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) about whether they would be willing to support the need for more resource to take the SAVVI work forward (both in relation to child poverty and other policy areas) which IS report have been promising.

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:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/keeping-promise-implementation-plan/pages/2/>

Coupled with this was the vision and Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support to promote consistent standards of practice 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.

Current projects which are supported through this fund are

- The Family Placement Team recruited two extra staff to do initial and full assessments on Kinship Carers. Hence speeding up this process. This also allowed for every Kinship Carer to have an allocated Social Worker.
- The Throughcare and Aftercare Team recruited two extra staff to work with young people during their care and aftercare journey. This has been of particular importance with the increasing numbers of young people coming in to our care through the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- The Care Experience Health Team was further developed. Amongst other things 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). Developing the joint work between CAMHS and Education to support families of children exhibiting emotional distress.

In addition 8 Foster Households have received training from CAMH's in working with troubled children and young people and are supported by them. This came after listening to young people whose message was "stop telling us to go to CAMH's." This has proven a very successful way to wrap around care experience for children and it currently supports between 12 and 15 children and young people.

- A Trauma Coordinator has also 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 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 to support and listen to children and young people and advise other education staff of best ways to work positively with them.

In all of this it is recognised that the principles of whole family support must involve all partners. Through the Third Sector Interface we are exploring how the third sector in Argyll & Bute can be more efficiently in supporting children and their families.

As we move forward we are interested in looking at how we can more effectively utilise the sum of all the ring fenced and / or short term grants. Moving beyond the funding silos which the grant structures have forced us into at the moment. There is a willingness to do across HSCP & Council boundaries

Early Years Supports

Help in the Early Years

Offering support and advice in a child's early years is one of the most effective ways of getting children and families off to a good start and engaging with issues that might lead to child poverty. Importantly, in Argyll and Bute, there is a joined up approach that sees health professionals both working together and referring on to third sector and advice services. For example, Health Visitors and Midwives work with Bute advice centre who help with assist with welfare, benefits and rights advice and support. They also refer into the HELP Project, who work with young people under 25-years-old in Dunoon and on Bute. The HELP Project work with young people on issues like advice and support on issues such as housing, benefits, employment and wellbeing. Another example would be the close working that takes place with Bute Oasis, a local third sector organisation who have a food bank and offer food packages and free clothing /baby equipment to the most vulnerable families. Health Visitors will also redistribute items such as baby clothes, given to them by families for those more in need.

Health Visitors use and share resources like Bute advice's financial health check leaflet at antenatal contact or at any point and the Do You Have Money Worries Guide. Referrals are made to Argyll and Bute Council Welfare Rights Teams, and to ALLenergy. Families are also signposted to food banks where necessary. In January 2024, with the poverty agenda in mind, the health visitors in Helensburgh and Lochside commenced a weekly drop-in session for parents that focused on feeding, weaning and providing support, advice and signposting to relevant organisations.

Family Nurse Partnership Programme

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 will work 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. It is hoped that the programme will prove valuable to new young mothers and be rolled out to other areas of Argyll and Bute in the course of time.

Best Beginnings

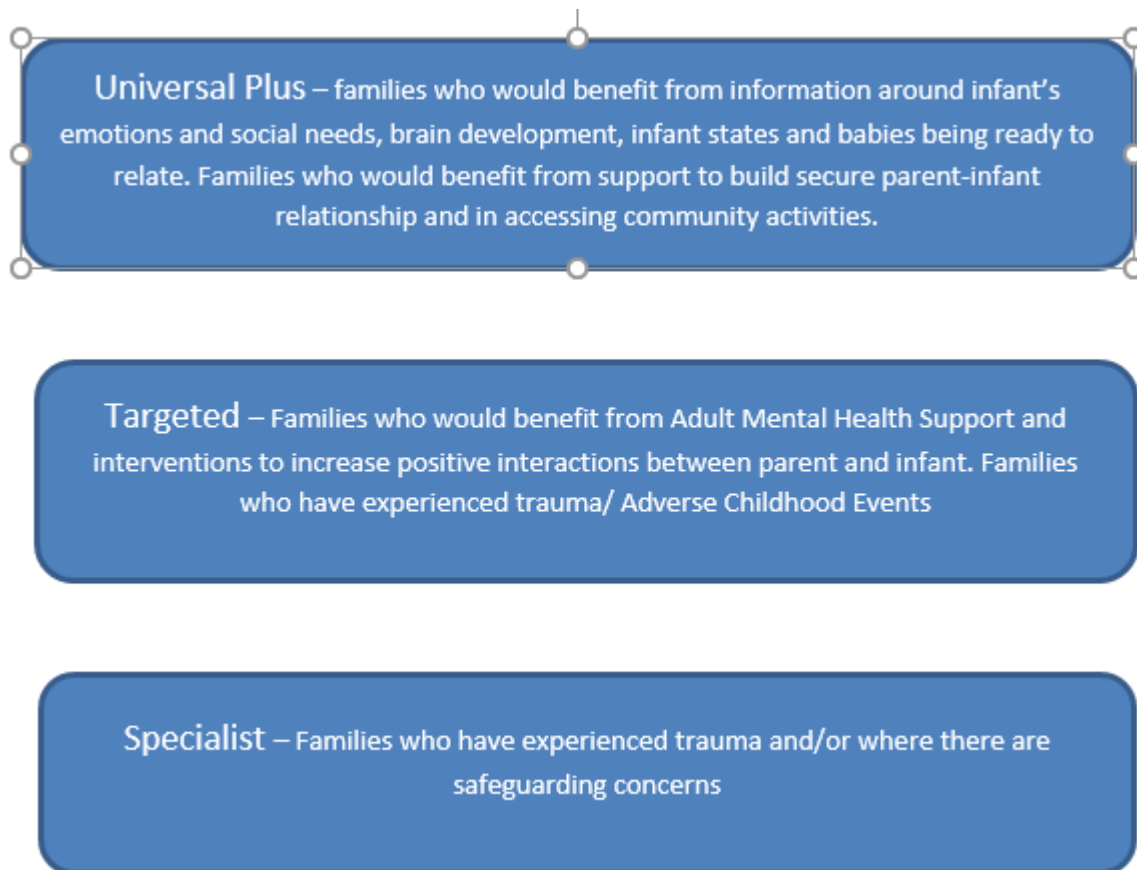
Argyll & Bute Infant Mental Health Service, Best Beginnings launched in Spring 2022 and works to support early relationships between babies and their carer's. We deliver this vision by working across four strands:

1. Direct Clinical Work
2. Training
3. Consultation
4. Community Engagement

The Argyll & Bute Infant Mental Health service comprises of one practitioner – Parent-Infant Therapist who covers Argyll and Bute wide offering a range of ways of working with infants together with their parents or carers where there are identified relational difficulties which is impacting on the infant's mental health. Mental health for babies means having rewarding relationships with parents or carers; developing the ability to manage emotions; being interested and curious; and being able to learn and explore about their world around them. The referral age for the infants is from birth - 3rd birthday.

The Infant Mental Health Services vision is to embed the 'voice of the infant' throughout Argyll & Bute Communities and develop an 'infant centred service' supporting universal services with an 'infant centred approach'.

We offer both individual and group therapeutic interventions to families from conception to a child's third birthday. We support families where there is a parent-infant relationship difficulty and those with risk factors that suggest a difficulty may occur in the future. We work with families requiring a small amount of support (Universal Plus level) and those requiring extended therapeutic and community interventions (Targeted and Specialist levels).



Three boxes showing different levels of service that families can have

Referrals

We continue to work with most of the families referred to us, having accepted 14 of the 17 referrals received from April 2023-24. Families accepted for individual work waited an average of 18 days between referral and first assessment appointment. There were twenty New-born Behavioural Observations carried out in relation to a six-month pilot with the Mid Argyll Midwifery service. (A report will follow with regards the outcome to this). There were three referrals for consultation.

Training

Offering Infant Mental Health training to other professionals, volunteers and students is a vital part of our role at Best Beginnings. Through our interactive training days we support the Early Years workforce to consider the importance of relationships to the development of infants, particularly in those critical 1001 days. This year thirty practitioners throughout A&B attended the ‘Introduction to Infant Mental Health’ training and Seventeen attended ‘The Impact of Family Violence on Infant Mental Health’. There is ongoing support offered to Health Visitors and Midwives in our monthly reflective practice group.

Community Engagement

In June last year during Infant Mental Health awareness week we held a presentation for parents in Helensburgh on 'Bonding with your Baby' which was held in one of the local community church halls.

Service Development

We continue to grow and develop the Infant Mental Health Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (IMH DDP) special interest group linked in with and receiving supervision from the DDP Network, details of which are on their website. This group is for practitioners trained to at least level one DDP and who are beginning to think about applying DDP principles within their service in Perinatal, Infant, and Maternal, Neonatal or similar services. The group will include thinking about research, service development, training and anonymised case studies.

A six-month pilot with North Highland is about to commence in May offering a monthly webinar for parents on 'Baby Crying and Normalising Baby Behaviour'. The hope is that this will reduce parental anxiety and reduce costs for specialist formulas.

Infant Food Insecurity

This issue was raised at national Improvement and Child Poverty Lead meetings at the end of last year. Concerns had been raised that there was evidence of poverty leading to poor infant feeding, including early weaning and the watering down of baby formula.

Locally an Infant Food Insecurity Short Life Working Group was created; members come from Health, Social Work, Advice Services and the Third Sector. First steps were to create an Advice Pathway. Research shows that the people most likely to be approached by parents in infant food crisis circumstances, were Health Visitors and Midwives. A leaflet was created specifically for these groups to use to advise parents. Training on the use of the leaflet and offering assistance, was given to them by Julie Semple and Rachel McNicol from the SLWG. The leaflet itself was shared more widely, for example to advice services, Food banks and the Third Sector; a 1,000 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 second step is being taken in the form of an Infant Food Insecurity Pilot Study. This is to ascertain what the level of need is and where it is. The pilot will take place over 6 months, August to January. Supermarket vouchers, or cash if necessary, will be given in cases of immediate need for infant formula / food, where there is no other recourse. These will be distributed for that purpose to Health Visitor, Midwives, advice and welfare rights survivors and the Third Sector. A leaflet will be handed out with each voucher or cash payment, explaining that this is a limited resource and part of a pilot study and they should seek advice to try and resolve long term concerns.

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 also 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)

In 2023 Let's Grow Kids UK commissioned research which was carried out by Professor J McKendrick and his academic team at Glasgow Caledonian University. Further research is being carried out in 2024 that will give us greater insight into emerging themes in child poverty and cost of living impact.

For more information or to read the LGKUK research please click here [Home | Let's Grow Kid's UK \(lets-grow-kids.co.uk\)](https://www.lets-grow-kids.co.uk/)

Key Areas of the Plan

A. Increasing Income from Employment and Earnings

Employability

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

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
- 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 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 AliEnergy 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.

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.

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

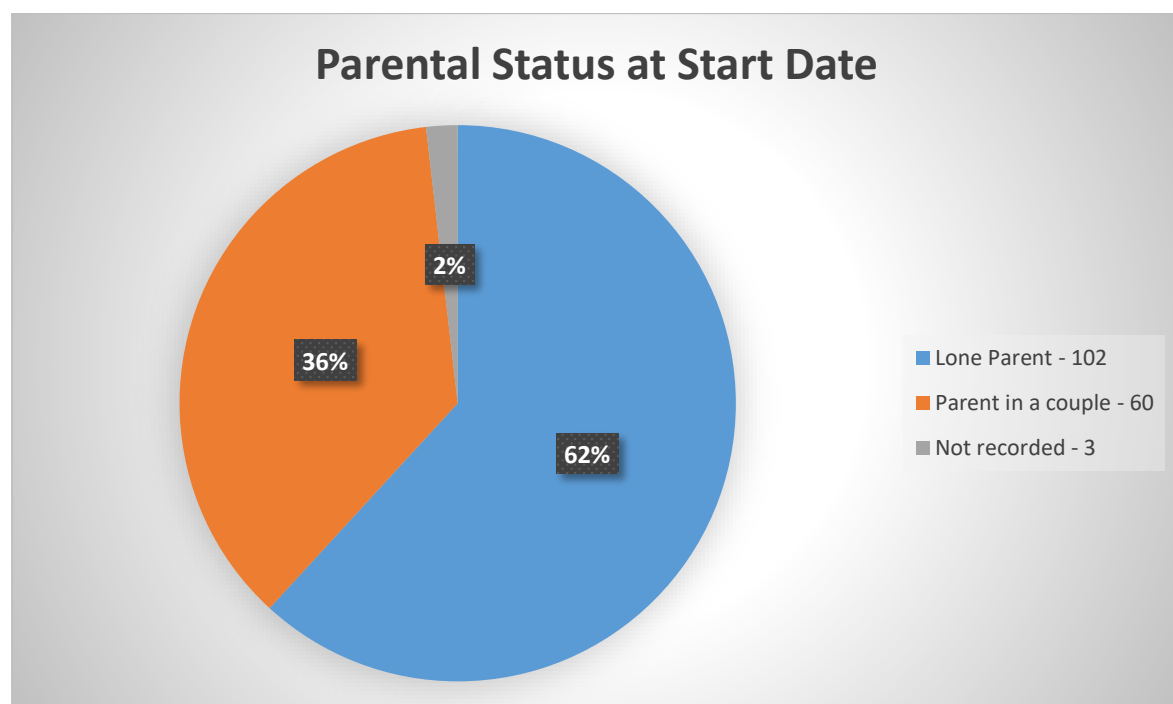
The ERI is available to use as a contribution to the additional costs of recruiting and sustaining eligible participants in employment. The ERI can be utilised in several ways

such as for additional supervisory costs, training, initial travel to work costs, specialist in work support, or wages.

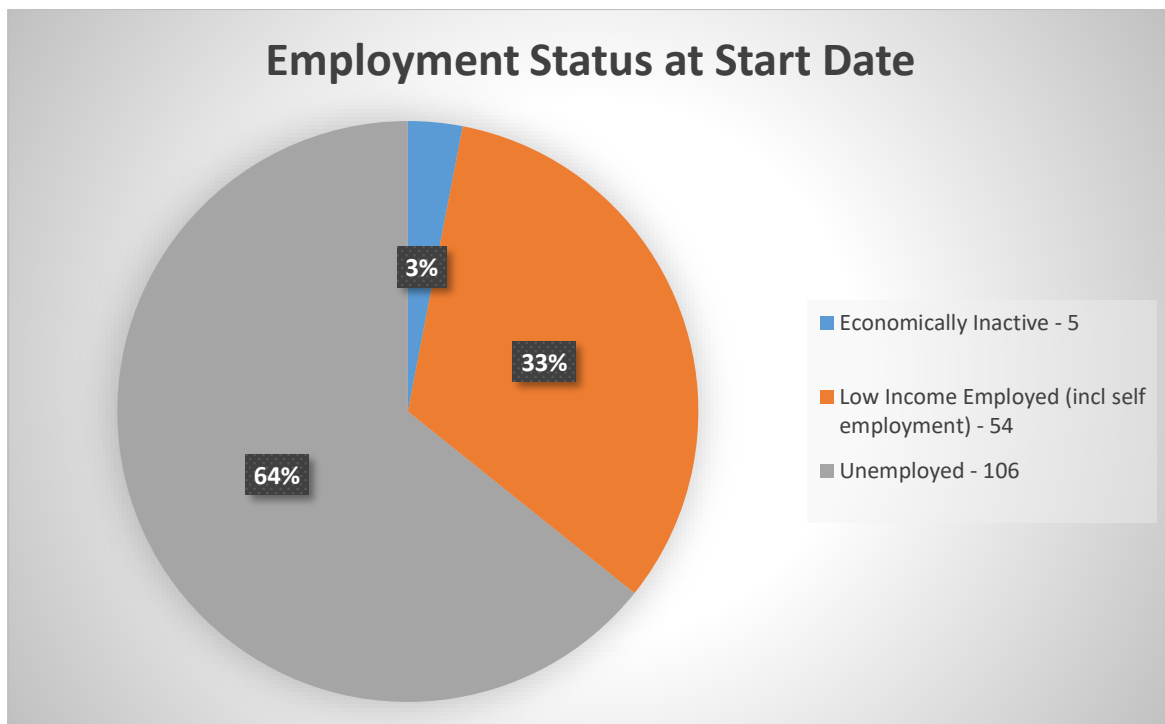
Up to £6,000 per participant is claimable, this allows employers to offer unemployed parents the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to **18 months or more**.

The **Parental Welfare Fund** is aimed at parents receiving support through the PESF who successfully secure employment. It helps with the transition to work and can alleviate any worries. This fund offers up to £1,000 payable over the first 13 weeks of employment. <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/parental-transition-fund>

During 2023/24 a total of 165 parents commenced support under PESF/NOLB:



A Pie Chart showing parent status, single or a couple



A Pie Chart showing job status at the start of the programme

Of these 165 parents, at the outset of support 83 advised they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more.

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

Fair Start Scotland (FSS) delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team on behalf of People Plus. This is a flexible support service to help people get ready for work and achieve their potential.

To be eligible participants must be:

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

The majority of parents opted to be supported via PESF/NOLB therefore only 19 unemployed parents (4 lone parent/15 parent in a couple) commenced FSS in 2023/24. Of these 12 reported a disability or long-term health condition at start date. A total of 10 parents have moved into employment and now receive in-work support, 3 have ceased engaging and 6 continue to receive pre-work support.

New referrals to the Scottish Government's national FSS employability service ceased 31st March 2024. Current FSS customers will continue to receive the full range of employability support they need to move into work, which could include up

to 18 months pre-work and up to 12 months in work support (depending on their circumstances).

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 7 unemployed parents (4 lone parent / 3 parent in a couple) completed a work placement in 2023/24. Of these 2 reported a disability or long-term health condition at start date. A total of 4 parents have moved into employment, 1 returned to the Ukraine and 2 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 16 parents (6 lone parent / 10 parent in a couple) accessed the training intervention in 2023/24. Of these parents 5 were low income employed and 11 unemployed. A total of 5 parents who were previously unemployed have secured employment, 2 previously unemployed parents whereabouts is currently unknown, 1 low income employed has increased her earnings as a direct result of the training, 3 low income employed remain in their current posts and are seeking new employment. The remaining 5 parents are still undertaking training.

Successes

In 2022/23 a total of 76 parents supported by PESF/NOLB commenced employment thus having a positive impact on their household income. Of these job starts, 26 are self-employed being the ideal option given their individual circumstances. For those parents not quite ready to move into employment, support and training continues to allow them to move along the employability pipeline.

Five parents took part in the childminding pilot working with an Employability Coach to build confidence, coordinate training including Paediatric First Aid and Food Hygiene and guide them along their journey. In addition, progression to self-employment was supported via Inspiralba's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem self-

employment pilot. The Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) provided specialist support, including the 'Childminding Induction Programme' and Argyll and Bute Council's Early Years Team assisted with area specific advice. Bute Advice provided specialist benefit advice and an experienced local Childminder also offered additional mentoring and a learning exchange encouraged peer learning. Assistance with set up costs, including purchase of toys, equipment and minor adaptations to the home to ensure Care Commission Compliance was also available.

The programme highlights the value of partnership working with multiple benefits; for the individual (increasing their employability potential), for the local area (increasing availability of childcare provision), and for other parents (reducing barriers with available childcare).

'I am so grateful to Inspiralba for giving me the confidence to start my childminding journey. Without their help, support & encouragement I would have struggled to do this.' Parent

'We are delighted that in March 2024 two of our clients received their registration certificates from the Care Inspectorate and can now provide childminding services in their local area, one is awaiting her Care Commission visit which is the final step of the registration process. The other participant will be ready to submit her application in the very near future and one parent has taken up alternative work in a Social Work setting, using the skills and experience gained.' Inspiralba Employability Coordinator.

Case Study 1 – Employability Team

Background

X is a 30 year old single mother, referred to Argyll and Bute Council by her Work Coach at DWP. She was referred due to losing her job during Covid-19 and living in a jobless household, relying on Universal Credit.

Barriers/Challenges

Being the sole carer for her child, X's biggest barrier was childcare. X had no support network since her partner left and her family were abroad. Another barrier was that being of ethnic minority, English is not her first language. X struggled at times to understand the benefit system, apply for jobs and attend interviews.

Hopes and Aspirations

X's long term goal was to work with children but she didn't have the right qualifications and didn't know where to go for help.

Support Pre-Employment

After just a month of support from her PESF Engagement Worker, X secured a part time job as a receptionist in a local hotel. She was able to access all of the benefits available to her and her monthly income increased. With support from her Engagement Worker, X applied for an Access to Childcare Course at her local college

and was successful. Working in partnership with Argyll College, X's Engagement Worker helped to apply for funding and any financial support that she was eligible for whilst at college. She provided X with a laptop, Wi-Fi and books required to start, meaning she could do her college work at home while her daughter was in bed.

After a short period of disengaging, X reached out to her PESF Engagement Worker and disclosed that she had to flee domestic abuse and had relocated with her daughter. They were sleeping on a friend's couch until they found somewhere to stay. X's Engagement Worker got in touch with housing and helped her complete a homeless application. Her Engagement Worker was in regular contact with housing which helped speed up the process. She also helped X to apply for a Community Care Grant to get white goods and carpets for her new flat.

X was referred by her Engagement Worker to the local mental health services. Having left college, she contacted Argyll College and was able to enrol X in the college in that area. She also helped secure a nursery place for her young daughter.

Achievements, Outcome and Impact

X has recently graduated from college with an NC in Early Education and Childcare. She has secured employment as a Supply Learning Assistant. X hopes to get some experience and then return to college to do an HNC, to enable her to become a Nursery Teacher. X's confidence has really grown and she is mentally, physically and financially in a better place.

Participant Quote

'Thank you for all of your help over the last couple of years, especially the last year. You have been a really great support to me and my daughter when I was in a bad place. I am glad my work coach referred me to PES or I wouldn't be in the position I am now, graduating from college and working towards becoming a Nursery Teacher, which is my dream job.'

Case Study 2 – Inspiralba

Background

Z was attending sessions with the NHS Community Psychiatric Team and they made him aware of the Employability Programme, he then self-referred to Inspiralba. He is a lone parent with a 3 year old daughter. Z had long standing issues with addiction and mental health and he felt that this was a barrier in moving forward and actively looking for employment. He became unemployed due to an injury at work in January 2022 and became reclusive and lost his confidence. Z lived with his parents and was claiming Universal Credit (UC), he had no savings and was unable to afford the refresher courses/tickets required to return to work offshore. Z felt a bit stuck and was unsure of what his next steps were so decided to refer himself to the service to see what support was available.

Barriers/ Challenges

Z lacked confidence and due to his mental health issues struggled with self-belief often doubting his capabilities. In the past he has had support from other agencies but he felt that this did not focus on his wishes and that he was pushed into applying for employment that was not right for him or his circumstances. He was also struggling financially and this was a huge barrier to completing the necessary courses to enable him to take up work offshore. The required courses were out with his financial means. As well as the cost of the courses, given the rural nature of Argyll there would be a requirement for travel and accommodation costs as the course was in Glasgow.

Hopes and Aspirations

Z wanted to go into full time employment again in a specific employment sector. He also wanted to improve his mental health and felt that having structured employment would help with this. As a lone parent, he felt it important to support his child and was not able to do this on his UC low income.

Support Pre- employment

One to one employability coaching was provided via weekly appointments at a time and date which suited Z. He lived in a rural area and did not have access to a car therefore his appointments were tied in with the bus timetable. We also checked in regularly over the phone as it became apparent that he could become overwhelmed at times and needed extra support. Support was provided to assist him to register for appropriate jobs, complete his CV and identify and purchase suitable training to enable him to access employment offshore. We agreed to assist Z to undertake relevant training and refresher courses as well as assisting with costs of travel and accommodation for these. After booking him on the appropriate course, with his permission his Employability Coach contacted the provider to explain his situation to make them aware he was on the employability programme, should there be any issues when he was away completing the training. Z completed AEC1, Engineering Course and FPFFU Fire Fighting Course. Support was provided to register with an offshore employment site and set up alerts to any appropriate vacancies. We completed mock interviews which Z stated helped him greatly as he was much more prepared for interviews. We also spoke about disclosing to his employer about his struggles with mental health if he was offered employment as there may be support available from them.

Specialist Advice

Due to issues of financial insecurity and debt, specialist advice was provided by Bute Advice. They carried out a full benefits check, to ensure that Z was receiving all benefits he was entitled to. Specialist support from We Are With You who provide advice to people struggling with mental health and problems with addiction was also offered and accepted. We agreed to register on an offshore employment site and set up alerts to any appropriate vacancies. It was agreed we would pay for the cost of the required refresher courses as well as travel and accommodation for these. Z said the additional support from We Are With You made a huge difference to him as his NHS appointments were very formal and only once per month, he was happy that he was offered weekly appointments with one of their Support Workers. He feels that he is more aware of his triggers and that this has helped him managing his periods of poor mental health.

Support in work

Support was provided to access the Parental Welfare Fund, as his job was in England the transport and accommodation costs are high so the grant helped to alleviate some of the financial pressures for commencing employment.

Achievements, outcomes and impacts

Z has been in employment since the beginning of December 2023 and initial reports from him that he is doing well and enjoying the challenge. He is on a rota of 2 weeks on/2 weeks off so is enjoying the time off with his daughter and this is making a huge difference to his mental health.

Participant quote

Z would 100% recommend the support to others. *“I felt a bit lost and was unsure what to do with my life, there would be no way I could have gotten to where I am not without the support I received from Inspiralba”.*

Challenges

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

Following the Scottish Government awarding monies to recruit a Child Poverty Co-Ordinator the initial attempt to appoint was unsuccessful, however this post has now been filled.

Plans Ahead

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

On receipt of the NOLB 24/25 Offer of Grant from the Scottish Government the Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership (ABEP) will devise and offer pre-employment and low income employment support in line with funding requirements. Following the successful childminding and budget cookery pilots' part of this allocation will be utilised to continue these interventions.

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

ABEP Delivery Action Plan review to be carried out.

The Employability Team has secured UK Government funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to offer unemployed residents of Argyll and Bute pre-employment support, training and work placements. Training will also be available to those in low income employment who hope to upskill to enable them to apply for higher paid job opportunities. All interventions will continue to be available from April 2024 to March 2025.

Inspiralba Film

Inspiralba is a charitable enterprise established in 2009, with the aim to support economic growth and deliver social and environmental benefits for communities across Scotland. They provide a range of services which offer; employability for those furthest from the job market, business support, learning opportunities and advocacy with a focus on rural social enterprise. Their collaborative model enables partners from across the third sector to create a nurturing environment which encourages individuals with a range of barriers to work, to access opportunities and progress to achieve their potential. This short film by Inspiralba is about the Spark Your Purpose Programme. The film and sound were captured by one of our wage based participants and he has really captured the essence of the work we do.

The link below takes you to the short film on our Spark Your Purpose programme.

[Spark Your Purpose - Employability Short Film, 23-24 | Rural Social Enterprise Hub \(ruralsehub.net\)](https://ruralsehub.net/spark-your-purpose-employability-short-film-23-24-rural-social-enterprise-hub)

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 group work and 1-1 coaching conversations. We work closely with our partners within the school to identify young person who are considered to be most at risk of not making a positive progression from school, helping those young people to develop their career management skills and move onto education, employment, or training when they leave school.

From 1 June to 30 September 2023, we delivered 1,361 Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for 1,169 school pupils through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions.

For more information, please click on the following link. [What We Do - Scotland's Career Service](#)

School Leaver Cohort 20/21 - 801 young people left school during the 20/21 school cohort and our team worked hard over the summer months to follow up those who had left to ensure support was offered. The 2023 Annual Participation Measure showed that of the 3,156 16–19-year-olds in Argyll & Bute 95.6% 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 30 September 2023, we delivered 278 Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for 172 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 Youth Hub format. As part of the Careers Review Skills Development Scotland have been looking at where our services are delivered through a place-based approach lens. This has seen us co-locating our centres with partners such as Live Argyll and DWP. To see the location of our new centres click on the following link - [Argyll & Bute Local Skills Development Centres](#)

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

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

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

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

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

From 1 April to 30 September 2023, we have supported a number of employers and 18 individuals dealing with redundancy.

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

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

As at the 30 September 2023 of the 2,723 maintained school pupils in the local authority, 79% were registered on myworldofwork.co.uk.

The Apprenticeship Family; Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships

A Foundation Apprenticeship is a work-based learning qualification for senior phase's secondary students, typically in S5 and S6. It allows students to gain an industry recognised qualification and workplace experience while still attending school. In 2021-22 (current published data to date) 78 pupils started Foundation Apprenticeships in schools at SCQF Level 4-6 in this area.

A Modern Apprenticeship is a work-based training program that allows individuals to gain qualifications while working. They are designed to help people develop practical skills and knowledge directly related to their job and industry. From 1 April to 29 September 2023, we supported 193 Modern Apprenticeship starts. 67.4% of the starts in the local area were aged 16-24. The Modern Apprenticeship achievement rate in Argyll & Bute is 72.0%.

A Graduate Apprenticeship is an advanced work-based learning program that allows individuals to earn a degree while working. It combines academic study with practical, on the job experience, designed to meet both the needs of the learner and employer. In 2021-22 (current published data to date) there were 9 registered Graduate Apprentices with a home address in the local authority and 6 registered with employers based in the area.

For more information on Foundation Apprenticeship, Modern Apprenticeship and Graduate Apprenticeships please visit the [Skills Development Scotland - Employer Hub](#)

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

Careers Review:

Partners across Scotland have come together to deliver the most comprehensive review of Scotland's career services in a generation. The Career Review has engaged hundreds of practitioners, partners and people entitled to services to co-design how services are delivered. Launched in February 2022, Careers By Design outlined ten recommendations designed to deliver the ambition of [Scotland's Careers Strategy](#). The final report of the [Careers Review](#), skills and experiences to grow and succeed in a rapidly changing world, describes how this redesign will be delivered to ensure people can access the skills and experiences to grow and succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Education

Early Years

In response to requests from working parents on several of Argyll and Bute's island communities, the Early Years Team introduced a Childcare Pilot to provide purchase-able childcare which would enable parents to access work or study. Currently operating within 3 island communities and utilising available space and staffing within our existing ELC units, to date the pilot has supported 12 families on rural islands to purchase non-statutory ELC and wrap around care for their 2 and 3 year old children. The project will continue to support parents within rural communities to access work and training.

The Early Years team have remained committed to securing key professional learning is strengthening understanding of the critical role of the adult alongside the child in learning. Across Session 2023-24, 85% of settings engaged in a bespoke, local authority re-launch of national practice guidance, 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me', co-facilitated with Education Scotland. Beyond this, 63% of settings have been invited to participate within invitations co-facilitated by Education Scotland, with focus on the process of co-design in response to context; to consider unit blocks as a powerful resource to facilitate rich interdisciplinary learning and pedagogical leadership of ELC. These opportunities have been with intent in inviting colleagues from two sectors, supporting learners across the early level, into one conversation. This is increasing children's access to their entitlement of a rich breadth of curriculum, developmentally appropriate to need, and increasingly evidenced by interactions, spaces and experiences which reflect beliefs about children and childhood.

Based on data we can assert that the majority of our preschool children are meeting their developmental milestones before starting school. As yet, we have not realised the target of 75% at the end of the last two sessions. (In June 2023 = 63% / June 2022 = 64% / June 2021 = 75%). Consequently, across Session 2023-24, Cluster Leads (2) have engaged improvement methodology targeting priority settings within locality. (data-informed) This is enabling children within the most deprived communities to benefit from engagement in evidenced-based, learning opportunities targeting the development of skills in literacy and numeracy. The model of engagement has been carefully considered to secure and sustain high quality learner experience by investing in learners at all levels. (I.e. children and adults).

At this point in the year, this is evidenced by successful completion of 6, six-week blocks of engagement (with a further 4 to follow, prior to end of academic session) 100% of children within identified group were observed to demonstrate progression of literacy or numeracy skills across organisers of listening and talking and reading and number and number processes, as evidenced by data in baseline and final observations. Data also evidenced improved confidence and capacity within adult learners, to be with intent in leading learning to secure progression in Literacy and Numeracy. Follow-up visits have evidenced sustainability of the model, observed via continuation of practice; increasingly rich environments for learning and influence extending to wider educator team.

Collaboration with Educational Psychology and colleagues across disciplines of Health is strengthening understanding of our discrete roles and responsibilities as, collectively, we give service to community. This has led to the initiation of ASN Early level Locality Networks, supporting key adults around the child to understand the need to be consistent in focusing investment in rights-based approaches and longer term outcomes, recognising that the solutions lie within them. Across session 2023-24, we have secured 74% participation.

Primary / Secondary Education

Education Officer for Scottish Attainment Challenge was appointed in April 2023 and is supporting 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. Stretch aims set for 22-23 were met in Literacy and Numeracy (P1, P4, and P7) Targets set for pupils at SIMD Q1 were exceeded in both areas reducing the poverty related attainment gap between the lowest and highest SIMD Quintile pupils by 14pp in Literacy and 4pp in Numeracy from the previous year (2022).

The Scottish Government's analysis of PEF spend for Argyll and Bute (2021/22 2022/23) reports an encouraging **upward trend** in overall investment spend:

2021/22 Financial year equating to a 63% investment of the total PEF available that year.

2022/23 Financial year equating to a 74% investment of the total PEF available that year.

2022/23 Financial and Academic Year equating to a **93% investment** of the total PEF available that year.

Staffing remains the biggest investment of PEF within our schools. (79% of PEF schools committing to additional staff). The largest proportion is spent on Pupil Support Assistants (42 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 (18 in post) Progress and Achievement data and progress towards Stretch Aims point to improvements. Another significant proportion is allocated to Family Liaison and Health and Wellbeing Officers (23 in post).

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 Allenergy 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.

iPay Impact is now in place across all schools. Schools can now more closely monitor payments and debt and identify quicker where support may be required. It ensures no pupils is excluded from a meal provision and schools continue to work with families in relation to eligibility for free school meals or potential discretionary free meals for a time period. The facility to use the system to pay for school trips is being rolled out to all schools.

25% of our schools currently provide a Breakfast Club. 74% of these are offered as a universal provision (open to all) and in over half (53%) they also work with identified families to target the offer. 74% of the provision is funded through PEF with staffing and catering supplies being the highest committed spends. 50% of the schools have been able to access additional community funding to support their provision. Over half of the schools evidence impact in improved attendance (56%) and engagement in learning (61%) 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.

Two schools were successful in Food for Thought grants. Gigha pupils planted and harvested their own produce and also used the grant to set up poultry farming (hens). Their produce is being used within school and community. Additional workshops for families were provided by a nutritionist to develop community knowledge of healthy recipes with locally available, affordable produce. A further session was provided for the community with the Gigha Foodies Group which allowed everyone on the island to access the knowledge of a professional nutritionist to help plan and make simple yet nutritious meals with ingredients which can be grown locally/purchased affordably.

Funds in Ardrishaig have supported the purchase and use of gardening resources and materials to develop growth of food on school grounds. This is being used to learn about healthy eating and supports the sale of school-produce within the local community.

Professional learning has been offered to all education staff, considering education priorities alongside council wide priorities. Two training sessions held over the year to introduce schools to Education Scotland's Equity Toolkit. Sessions were well attended and received by promoted staff within schools. Further awareness raising will be offered through the CLPL calendar in 24-25.

Money Counts training is a new addition to the Education CLPL calendar and will be run in partnership with HSCP colleagues through 24-25.

Expansion of FLO/ HWB Officer Network into 24-25 to create an Equity Network, open to all interested education staff. The table below illustrates a snapshot of the participation in a range of related CLPL in session 23/24.

CLPL	Roles within Education	No. of attendees
Social Security (Benefits) Session	Family Liaison Officers Education Support Officer	9
Breakfast Clubs	Family Liaison Officers Head Teachers Education Support Officer	11
Book Group	Teachers	2
Safe and Together	Family Liaison Workers	3
Bute Advice/ ALLenergy Collaborative	Family Liaison Officers	5
Planning for Impact with PEF	Head Teachers and Senior Leaders in schools	15
Equity Toolkit	Head Teachers and Senior Leaders in schools	19

A table showing numbers of staff taking part in different groups.

In addition to this CLPL, there has remained a focus on developing our understanding of our most vulnerable young people. During session 2022/23, a key development was the appointment in April of a Virtual Head Teacher for CECYP to lead the council's dedicated Care Experienced Education team, building further on the support provided for children and young people throughout the area.

The Council's Care Experienced Team have become the first local authority in Scotland to Achieve the "We Promise" Award with the council's Senior Leadership Forward also committing to this. This validates a commitment to supporting Care Experienced learners. The team assists pupils across Argyll and Bute, maintaining links between home and school, supporting attendance, wellbeing and learning support.

Raising attainment and delivering positive outcomes for Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) across Argyll and Bute will continue to be a key priority for the council in the year ahead.

At a meeting of the Community Services Committee, councillors welcomed positive news on the latest figures on the educational attainment and life chances of care experienced youngsters. Data on key areas such as positive destinations, attainment and school attendance for the area's care experienced children and young people shows that support from the Scottish Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge (CECYP) Fund is reaching those most in need.

The latest report shows that 94% of Argyll and Bute's CECYP have achieved a positive destination. Sixty per cent continued in school education, 11.5% went on to further education and higher education while 13.5% are in employment (paid and voluntary), with 9% undertaking formal training.

The figures in Argyll and Bute for those achieving a positive follow up destination exceeds the national percentage for both care experienced and non-care experienced learners. On attainment, National 4 results for all learners in Argyll and Bute are above the national average by 12%.

For school attendance, the total average attendance figure across primary and secondary schools for the area's CECYP was 87.4% with primary school attendance at 91.4% and secondary at 82.8%. The area's corporate parenting target is to have less than three exclusions of CECYP target, and to date that have been none. The Addressing Non Attendance (ANA) procedures that have been developed for all education setting in Argyll & Bute have been making a positive impact. Attendance is now monitored as part of Education Manager's Quality Improvement Visits with each individual school receiving attendance stretch aims.

In August 2023, Argyll and Bute Council commenced its partnership with MCR Pathways, 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.

Three secondary schools have participated in the programme in 2023-24, Hermitage Academy, Dunoon Grammar School and Oban High School. In each school, the Council employs an MCR Pathways Co-ordinator, who work 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.

The MCR Pathways programme has been highly successful in its first year. 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.

The programme continues to expand and develop in the three initial schools, while the Council is well-advanced in its planning to extend the MCR Pathways to three further secondary schools in 2024-25.

The 2024 Argyll and Bute Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Conference took place on 29th May in the Corran Halls, Oban. The theme of this year's conference was *Ensuring Opportunities for the Young People Who Need Them Most* which reflects both the aim of ensuring equity in young people's vocational and educational pathways, and the focus of one of the DYW Key Performance Indicators.

As well as keynote speakers, including the Scottish Government Minister for Higher and Further Education, delegates experienced presentations from four groups of young people, all of whom experience challenges and potential obstacles in entering the world of work: Care Experienced Young People; young people with Additional Support Needs; refugee and asylum-seeking young people, and young people engaging with MCR Pathways.

Our young people from these groups spoke of their experiences, but also of their hopes and aspirations, and how they felt employers, agencies and Third Sector representatives could best support them to reach their potential in the world of skills and employment. Delegates appreciated hearing first-hand what they could do and

what simple changes they could make to support disadvantaged and vulnerable young people into fulfilling and sustainable employment.

Children's rights has continued to be a high profile development. The development of The Rights Respecting Schools Award is an important part of preparing our school communities for this legislative change as well as ensuring that schools are prepared for the forthcoming Human Rights Bill. Through the Rights Respecting Schools approach, children and young people develop their understanding of a range of articles in a local, national and international context including article 27, *adequate standard of living*. Schools look at such articles in an age and stage appropriate way and consider their own unique context. We now have 69 schools registered for the award, demonstrating our on-going commitment to support schools in developing awareness of children's rights and imbed a rights based approach within the school environment. In the past year, 16 schools have progressed their Rights Respecting Schools journey. Through the UNICEF accredited journey, 30 schools have achieved Bronze, 19 Silver and 7 Gold. We will continue to provide support to schools to engage in this award, aiming to have 100% of our school accredited. In taking a rights based approach to education, schools have been developing or embedding pupil voice structures within their setting.

We have actively supported the development of the Children's Commissioner's Plan by connecting schools, groups of young people and individuals to the work that has been undertaken in this area. Argyll & Bute is represented on the Children's Commissioner's Panel. This participation is ensuring that issues that affect our most vulnerable young people, including those in remote and rural locations, is being heard. It is clear through our work with Argyll & Bute's pupil voice structures that our priorities align with those within the Children and Young People's Commissioner Plan. These are: Education, Poverty, Mental Health, Discrimination and Climate Change.

Education has continued to be supported by the Alcohol and Drug Partnership to participate in Planet Youth. We have progressed this work from engagement with 2 secondary schools in 2021 to 5 secondary schools in 2023. This work, in partnership with colleagues in Public Health, is developing protective factors for young people with the intention of reducing risk factors. We have recently been able to secure staff in Education and Public Health to increase involvement and engagement in this area. Through this work, the young people in S3 & S4 who participated reported that the lack of transport and not being able to afford activities were barriers to participation within their communities.

Smoke Free Me Drama (P7 Production) and You Are Not Alone Drama Productions have continued to be delivered to Argyll & Bute Schools. Evaluative discussions from pupils, staff, parents and carers have resulted in some planned changes for September 24 delivery. Changes include the P7 performance that will be called Smoke Free Generation, with greater focus on vaping as well as earlier delivery of the You Are Not Alone Performance, which will now be delivered to S2 pupils (S2 & S3 in session September 24 delivery).

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. In November 23, a further 17 staff were trained, including partner agencies. This has increased engaged schools from 3 to 7. This exceeds our target for school engagement within our development plan. The work continues to bring together engagement from partners such as Police Scotland and Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis. Our aim for the next academic session would be to ensure engagement across all secondary schools and build capacity within our training team.

UHI Argyll and University of the Highlands and Islands

The academic year 2023 to 2024 has been a difficult year for college learners demonstrating that the impact of the COVID19 pandemic is continuing. Teaching and support staff have observed that increasingly learners are coming to college with reduced study skills or ability to learn independently. A lot of this can be directly related to the adapted way learning had to be delivered during the pandemic, particularly to school age pupils with decreased levels of focus and concentration coupled with increased levels of fragile or poor mental health. Anxiety levels particularly among our younger learners are now very high, causing additional barriers to learning.

During 2022/23 the college had tried to make learning accessible to everyone in a hybrid manner, allowing students to choose whether to link into their classes remotely from home or to link in from their nearest learning centre. This was not successful as many of the students linking in from home did not engage well with their course or the rest of their class, resulting in increased feelings of isolation and poorer attainment. Because of this the college changed the approach, requiring all learners to attend their classes from centres unless study from home under some circumstances had been specifically identified on a personal learning support plan. This has helped to improve student satisfaction and attainment slightly but still is significantly lagging behind pre-covid19 levels.

Students themselves cited the biggest barriers to their attainment were:

- Cost of living – the need for employment income meant less time to devote to study,
- Mental health issues,
- Access to and difficulty with using digital technology,
- Access to affordable reliable childcare.

Cost of living support

Argyll College has continued to provide additional funding to students from identified low income families. This included a regular weekly payment of £20 to students who were already in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance and two one-off payments to students such as lone parents who were in receipt of Universal Credit. Support staff also made sure that students were aware of any additional benefits that they might have been eligible for, claimed any council tax rebates or used their Under 22 NEC for free bus travel as appropriate. Free Period products via Hey Girl continue to be promoted to students.

Mental health issues

Argyll College employs a Mental Health Counsellor specifically for students. The counsellor has seen a steady rise year to year in the number of students accessing this service with 43 students receiving 6 or more counselling sessions this year. This was a steep increase from 26 student in the previous year. In addition to the counselling service a further 80 students received support and wellbeing meetings as well as the general pastoral and signposting support that the college student advisors routinely provide. The college counselling service is now at capacity so there is concern regarding how any further increase in need could be managed in light of reduced funding available to support the service.

Digital Poverty

Argyll College has continued to invest in providing a bank of laptops for long term loan suitable for student level study. Allocation of these laptops is based on household income using a light touch assessment to identify these students. Within learning centres all students have access to laptops but for many students being able to continue their study at home out with course times is of significant benefit thus making these loan laptops essential to help improve learner outcomes. In 2023/24 over 40 laptops were given out on loan, with 22 of these being to students with addresses in SIMD20 and SIMD10 areas.

Access to childcare

Argyll College continue to provide financial childcare support for full time students but there can still be real problems for some students to be able to access registered childcare providers, particularly in some locations where there is a real shortage of providers. To try and address this problem the college is piloting a new approach to timetabling whereby some key courses (ones that seem to attract a higher proportion of lone parents, such as childcare courses) will be planned to be delivered purely within school hours allowing the parents sufficient time to put children into school and collect them at the end of the school day.

Other initiatives planned for 2024/25

- The college continues to promote awareness of the support that we can provide to Care Experienced learners and learners with caring responsibilities, particularly forging stronger links with external agencies to better support these cohorts.
- Argyll College will be rolling out a programme to become a trauma informed workplace over the next year.
- More short courses of 10 to 12 week duration, or specific upskilling and study skill courses to be delivered in 2024/25.
- Close work with Argyll & Bute Council to improve basic numeracy levels among adults through use of the Multiply Funding opportunity.
- Increase provision of work based learning curriculum to enable students to remain in employment whilst upskilling.

B. Increasing Income through Benefits

Benefits

The Benefits Team supported people in 2023-2024 with the following grants.

Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 there were 767 awards paid out to the value of £79,731.

Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grants – between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 there were 790 applications made and 370 awards paid out to the value of £509,437.

Total Programme Funding for the scheme was £458,284 which resulted in overspend of £130,884, this was met by the Council to enable continued support to vulnerable claimants.

Flexible Food and Fuel Fund

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

Discretionary Housing Payments

As at 31 March 2024 our spent and committed amount of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) was £0.894m out of a budget of £1.061m. The Council have a duty to pay DHPs to anyone on the benefit cap and looking at ways to automate DHP awards. As there is no Universal Credit data for Housing costs, need, is identified on application for this. New DHP guidance has been issued and we will consider our policy with key stakeholders in line with the guidance in the current year.

Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund

In 2023/24 the Council received an allocation of £141,000 to support Island Communities. The funds were spent as follows:

- Scotland Loves Local Cards – 1268 cards issued in December value of £85.
- 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 2023.

Social Security

Social security is a key part of the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty in Scotland. At Social Security Scotland, we have continued to build a system that delivers vital financial support to families when they need it most.

We have continued to improve and expand the support delivered, while ensuring that our core values of dignity, fairness and respect underpin all of our work.

Analysis published by the Chief Social Policy Adviser shows how social security spending is supporting policies aimed at reducing child poverty.

The Scottish Government has confirmed £614m will be invested in new benefits and payments that are only available in Scotland - such as the landmark Scottish Child Payment, which modelling estimates will keep 60,000 children out of relative poverty in 2024-25. Through Social Security Scotland the Scottish Government is delivering five family payments, including the Scottish Child Payment. These could be worth over £10,000 by the time an eligible child turns 6 and around £25,000 by the time an eligible child turns 16.

Scottish Child Payment remains one of the most important anti-poverty measures the Scottish Government has introduced. In 2023-24, the number of children being supported continued to grow, reaching an all-time high. In their December 2023 forecast, the Scottish Fiscal Commission estimated a take-up rate of 97% for under-6s and 86% for children aged 6 and over in 2024-25. We remain committed to continually increasing take-up among eligible families.

To further strengthen the support offered by our five family payments, the Scottish Government expanded eligibility for Best Start Foods by removing income thresholds for all qualifying benefits from February 2024.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission have estimated that an additional 20,000 pregnant women and young children are now eligible. This support helps to ensure that healthy and nutritious foods are available at a critical time, with the payment being available as soon as a woman knows they are pregnant. Following a further increase in the value from 1 April 2024, together our five family payments of Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Foods and the three Best Start Grant payments could now be worth over £10,000 by the time an eligible child turns 6, and around £25,000 by the time they turn 16.

In the last year, research with clients shows people are happy with the service they are getting from Social Security Scotland – with 94% of people rating their

experience of receiving payments as good or very good. 93% of people who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland felt they had been treated with kindness, and 90% said their experience with staff was “very good” or “good”.

Scottish Benefits

The benefits that we deliver include five family payments, which help towards the costs of being pregnant or looking after a child.

Five Family Payments

Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment – one-off payment of up to £754.65 from 24 weeks in pregnancy up until a baby turns 6 months for families who get certain benefits.

Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment – one-off payment of £314.45 when a child is between two and three years and six months for families who get certain benefits.

Best Start Grant School Age Payment – one-off payment of £314.45 when a child would normally start primary one for families who get certain benefits.

Best Start Foods – a pre-paid card from pregnancy up to when a child turns three for families on certain benefits to help buy healthy food

Scottish Child Payment - £106.80 every four weeks to help towards the costs of looking after each child under 16 for families who get certain benefits

Disability Benefits

Adult Disability Payment - extra money to help people who have a long-term illness or a disability that affects their everyday life. It replaces Personal Independence Payment people in Scotland previously delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Child Disability Payment - extra money to help with the costs of caring for a child with a disability or ill-health condition. It replaces Disability Living Allowance for children in Scotland that was previously delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Carer Benefits

Carer's Allowance Supplement – an automatic payment made twice a year to people who get Carer's Allowance through the DWP on certain dates each year.

Young Carer Grant – an annual payment of £383.75 for people 16, 17 or 18 who care for people who get a disability benefit for an average of 16 hours a week or more.

Carer Support Payment – money to help you if you’re a carer. You can receive £81.90 a week if you’re eligible.

Heating Benefits

Child Winter Heating Payment – a £251.50 payment to help families of a child on the highest rate care component of Disability Living Allowance for Children to heat their homes.

Winter Heating Payment –A yearly payment to help people on low income benefits who might have extra heating needs during the winter. The payment for winter 2024/25 is £58.75.

Other Benefits

Funeral Support Payment – money towards the costs of a funeral, helping people who receive certain benefits and are responsible for paying for a funeral.

Job Start Payment – £314.45 for 16 to 24 year olds who have been on certain benefits for six months or more to help with the costs of starting a job.

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

Social Security Scotland has teams of specialist advisers in every Local Authority area in Scotland. They are available to give information on Scottish benefits, help clients to apply for benefits and signpost to other services if needed. People can meet our advisers in community venues such as health centres, libraries or food banks or can request a video or phone call. We can also visit people in their homes if needed.

The Argyll and Bute team of local advisers have been attending events across the area including the MECOPP Health and Wellbeing event at The Rockfield Centre.

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

Welfare Rights Team

Introduction

Argyll and Bute Councils Welfare Rights aims to 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.

We provide a free, confidential and impartial benefits advice, information and appeal representation service. The service has a key focus on maximising income and

reducing poverty. Our support is targeted at some of the most vulnerable in our communities

Additional Funding

In 2021 as part of the focus on Improving Opportunities for People and Communities, Argyll and Bute Council agreed to provide additional resources to support people experiencing poverty and hardship by investing in two additional Welfare Rights support staff for two years these temporary posts have now been extended to March 2024. This extra funding and resource has allowed the team to:

- Increase capacity for visits and appeal representation;
- Engage more with partners, particularly the HSCP;
- Provide more support and for remote island communities;
- Increase the profile of the service;
- Increase staff development and training.

This additional funding and resource has allowed us to enhance the Welfare Rights Service provided to the people and communities of Argyll and Bute, bringing much needed extra income into the local area.

2023/24 Highlights

A total of **1352** clients were provided with assistance/help.

Appeals, reconsiderations and re-determinations resulted in awards amounting to **£311,446** in total.

The service helped the residents of Argyll and Bute to claim **£4.45 million** in additional benefits that may have otherwise remained unclaimed, thus assisting independent living & preventing homelessness. This an increase of around £130k from 2022/23. This figure includes approximately **£750,000** for individuals and families affected by cancer supported by the partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and **£315,560.50** for clients referred via a current project to provide Welfare Assistance in 5 rural GP surgeries in the Mid-Argyll and Kintyre area.

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.

Not all cases result in a financial gain, over **290** cases were closed after “general advice provided” and **495** benefit checks were carried out. Many of these client’s will have been signposted to claim benefits themselves. Others may be advised of no benefit entitlement following a benefit check and be referred/signposted to food banks, energy advice/vouchers and other support mechanisms available.

2023/24 Challenges

The transfer of clients from legacy benefits to Universal Credit (UC) and from Personal Independence Payment to Adult Disability Payment was ongoing and this led to increased demand for Welfare Rights assistance.

The cost of living crisis continued to impact on families and individuals with increased numbers of clients coming to us for benefit checks often clients in full time work.

Plans/Objectives/Challenges for 2024/25

- Continue to promote and deliver a quality and consistent Welfare Rights Service to residents of Argyll and Bute.
- It is anticipated the number of people accessing the Welfare Rights Service will continue to increase due to the cost of living crisis and increased energy costs.
- Ensure the service is able to deal with the probable increase in demand for assistance due to the 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, Carer's Support Payment and Pension Age Winter Heating Payment.
- Argyll and Bute Council is one of the pilot areas for the introduction of Pension Age Disability Payment from 21/10/2024. In 2023/24 58% of our clients in were over pension age so a large part of our client group.
- Increase the profile of the service particularly in remote island communities and hard to reach groups.
- Ensure continued staff development and training.
- Gain Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers Accreditation.
- Engage effectively with partners and local community groups.
- Continue to work closely with NHS colleagues and the improvement Service to develop Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHP'S) in Argyll and Bute.

Community Link Workers

Community Link Workers sit within Primary Care Services to promote, protect and improve health and wellbeing by providing person-centred support which recognises that social issues, such as debt, relationships, employment and loneliness, affect people's health and wellbeing, and to connect people to sources of support or resources within their community.

You can find a link to their website here

<https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/local-hubs/argyll-and-bute-community-links>

In the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), a Community Link Working (CLW) service is available to 14/32 GP practices and is contracted to 3rd sector provide We Are With You. This current provision is targeted at those practices with the highest percentage of patients in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 5 and under, based on the total patient list size in these deciles within Argyll and Bute. Decile 1 being the most deprived and decile 10 being the least deprived in Scotland. The current service contract runs from December 2021 to December 2024 and employs 3.00 WTE (whole time equivalent) Community Link Workers

CLW sits within a number of Scottish Government guidelines including Tackling Health Inequalities in Scotland (2022). From April-December 2023, the service received 393 referrals, with an increase in referral numbers for mental health and wellbeing, and financial advice. Between September-December 2023, 52% of referrals were for mental health and wellbeing, and 19% for financial advice. Other top reasons for referral were social isolation, stress, long-term conditions, and housing and essential needs.

The service uses the Short Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale to show the impact of the service by assessing how people's wellbeing has changed between entry and exit. The service reports a high level of impact for people who have left the service having a positive change in their wellbeing with 91% of respondents experiencing a positive change.

"I felt I had an ally in navigating lots of things I could not have done alone. Invaluable Resource. Dignified is how I would put it. I felt listened too and understood regarding my difficulties, as they are hidden ones. Thanks (CLW) for all your support. I truly could not have done it without your help."

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. There is a strong correlation between improving people's financial situation and improved health outcomes so supporting patients around financial issues should:

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

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

Funding 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. The pilot will be evaluated on behalf of the Scottish Ministers by the Improvement Service in collaboration with the Scottish Public Health Network.

The first year of the service has 84 referrals across five GP practices. The majority of referrals were for clients over 65 years of age. 57% of clients had a long-term condition. Total client financial gain from Welfare Rights intervention from the start of the project is **£315,560.50**.



Bute Advice Centre will report on both the activities delivered by staff within Bute Advice Centre and as Co-ordinator of the Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum, services delivered by the various community food operations.

Bute Advice Centre

In the last year, Bute Advice Centre saw a huge period of activity and client demand. In the period April 23 – March 24 inclusive, the client gain achieved across all projects was £2,437,939 for 1472 cases.

Advisers have worked across a range of projects including:

- Delivering welfare rights and money advice services to individuals across the region as part of the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund, in collaboration with local foodbanks, Allenergy and Argyll and Bute Council.
- Delivering welfare rights services to Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA) tenants in the Bute & Cowal areas as part of the ACHA Welfare Rights Team. This also included giving tenants access to support through slow cookers, air fryers, thermal curtains and a range of other items to help over the winter.
- Targeted work with particular vulnerable groups across the region as supported by Age Scotland and Supporting Communities Funding.
- Helping parents get back into meaningful work through the Parental Employment Support Fund working closely with Inspiralba, Allenergy and Fyne Futures.
- Supporting clients to settle in Argyll and Bute through the Refugee Resettlement Programme.
- Working with Housing Services and Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP) to contact all those on a low income who are part of the Travelling Community to access grant support.
- Supporting the Community Food Forum.
- Outreach work across the region, highlighting our services and helping people tap into support.

Collaboration with partner organisations is key to offering a high quality holistic service to clients. Going forward management are determined to build on the success of the work achieved and secure future services for clients.

Plans for the future

Continue with our present collaborations and expand our impact through funding from HMRC to offer support to client. Through Good Things, offer low income clients access to sim cards offering free calls, texts and a huge amount of data download. Later this year we hope to offer free digital appliances such as phones, laptops etc.

Foodbanks

Bute Oasis

6 Argyle St, Rothesay, PA20 0AT

Referrals are received from Bute Advice Centre and other professional bodies along with self-referrals. 1310 clients and their families have been assisted in the last year. Families are struggling to pay bills and have enough money for food, mostly as a result of rising food prices. This is also a challenge for the foodbank itself to keep pace with demand. Future challenges are simply trying to raise enough funds to survive.

Helensburgh Foodbank

Community Hub, 116 East Princes St, Helensburgh, G84 7DQ

Two drop-in centres, Helensburgh 3 x 2 hour sessions weekly (Monday morning, Thursday afternoon and evening) and Rosneath 1 x 2 hr session weekly (Wednesdays). No referral needed, just turn up. In the period 1 Nov 22 – 31 Oct 23 the number of people seeking help rose by 30% and the foodbank gave out 80% more food bags compared to the year before covid19. 3605 food bags were issued, this supported 4866 adults and 1785 children.

Kintyre Foodbank

Unit 3, Snipefield, Albyn Road. Campbeltown PA28 6TP phone 0743599885.
Open Tuesdays 10.30am - 11.30am and Fridays 12.30am - 1.30pm.

Increasing numbers are a worry. Supported 60 adults and 19 children in March last year and 72 adults and 35 children this March. The main reason for people using the food bank is that benefits not being enough to live on which includes the rising cost of electricity. More clients in general and families in particular those where both parents are working. Fewer food donations, obviously food has gone up in price hugely. In particular, getting a big increase in clients during school holidays. Benefits don't cover buying new clothes and shoes needed by children. The year ahead looks like more of the same, we expect our numbers to grow.

Tiree Foodbank

Contact details: Dr John Holliday 07786 496 275. Alternate Sunday deliveries, but phone box is always open and on call 24/7. Supports 22 households with 32 clients.

Food, heating and travel costs are very high on the island. Fuel poverty is particularly common on the islands due to the exposed housing stock and poorly insulated buildings. The service is well accepted now and our client list is growing slowly. The challenges are raising money and a slight dependency culture in some clients after a

spell when we giving out a lot of Coop vouchers. We support several cats which are very important in the lives of some of our clients. Service needs more money, as currently have a fortnightly run of 19 households with a budget of around £200. Solar food store and a telephone box filled with food weekly.

Hub Grub Hub - individuals have benefitted from the service from April 23rd – March 24th; approximately - 175. 22 Kirk street, Dunoon Pa23 7DP.

Monday 1pm – 4pm.

Tuesday 10.30am -13.30pm; with sandwich lunch.

Thursday 3pm – 6pm; with supper 4pm - 5.30pm.

Friday 9.30am -12am; with breakfast 10am - 11.30am.

Reasons for using the foodbank. Food and fuel poverty and clients worrying about the future and what it holds. Changes in clientele. More young mums with children Challenges in the last year - Leasing a permanent building and being able to expand services to include art, craft, gardening, cookery classes. Provision of a school uniform bank alongside food provision. The future - Busy and challenging to raise funds for improving building and expanding Services.

Oban Hope Kitchen
New Hope
2 Soroba Road
Oban
PA34 4HU
01631565730

Community Hub offering a range of events and activities alongside the foodbank and Green Shoots Garden activities. Lunches are served at £1 per donation.

C. Cost of Living

Housing

In “The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK” the Joseph Rowntree Foundation looked at the links between housing and poverty and state that:

Housing costs are a major factor in determining whether people are pulled into poverty, with the cost of housing a key driver of poverty for renters in particular. In 2021/22, more than four in ten social renters (43%, 4.8 million people) and a third of private renters (35%, 4.4 million people) were in poverty after housing costs.

This adds to a situation where:

The combination of soaring bills and stagnating incomes means families are experiencing a sharp drop in living standards. The daily effects of this are acute;

when before the crisis many families had to choose between eating or heating their home, many are now unable to afford to do either. The stress and worry this causes is taking an enormous toll on parents' mental health.

Save the Children Fund state; August 2022 briefing note on the cost of living crisis

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.

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.

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. As a response to the Housing Emergency, a Housing Summit was held in November 2023 to seek solutions to many of the challenges being faced across the housing sector.

Rent levels

The Scottish Government is currently consulting on a proposed new Housing Bill which is scheduled to go through Parliament during 2024. 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.

Number of children in housing need in Argyll and Bute

As of March 2024, 3136 households were on the HomeArgyll Common Waiting List. 2139 of these households were in housing need and of these, 715 (33%) were households with children, with a total of 1375 children in housing need. Waiting list figures show that of the 940 households with children, 715 (76%) are considered to be in housing need.

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

HOME Argyll waiting list	No of households with children under 16	Total No of children
General list	583	1072
Homeless list	51	85
Transfer list	306	581
Total:	940	1738

Source: HOMEArgyll Common Housing Register March 2024

Affordable Housing Supply

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

- **New Builds** - In Argyll and Bute, in 2023-2024, 70 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. As of March 2024, 4 private homes have been acquired and added to the affordable rented stock, with another 11 in the process of acquisition and 17 further properties undergoing assessment.
- **Short-Term Let Legislation** - The Scottish Government considered that introducing the legislation¹ 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 2024, 3031 applications for short-term let licences have been received.
- **Supplying homes in the right places and homes for workers** – Research¹ has found that in remote rural and island communities, high house prices coupled

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

In 2023 the Scottish Government published the Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan, which directly addressed the challenges associated with the provision of housing for key workers. The Action Plan encompasses the £25M Key Workers Fund and states the following action:

We will work with local authorities to deliver the Rural Affordable Homes for Key Workers Fund to ensure that there is effective local engagement with local employers and registered social landlords to support the identification of additional homes for key workers

Similarly the February 2024 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.

Through the Argyll and Bute SHIP programme, the Strategic Housing Fund (SHF), and the Community Housing Network, Argyll and Bute Council in 2023/24 have supported the development or provision of new homes in a variety of remote or island locations. On Colonsay for example, support has been given to the Colonsay Community Development Trust for the construction of affordable housing on the island. As an example of innovative practice, a major local employer (MOWI) have contributed to the capital elements of this project to allow them to secure the allocation rights for a number of the properties for their staff. An Empty Homes Officer post 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 for HSCP staff. This will enable 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.

- 16-18-year-olds
When there is a lack of supply of affordable homes, sixteen to eighteen-year-olds who are unable to live at home due to overcrowding or due to the family home not being accessible from their place of employment or training may be forced to stay

with friends / 'sofa surfing'. These insecure and precarious housing arrangements can easily result in homelessness.

Prior to the Housing Summit in November 2023, community surveys were issued seeking feedback on the main housing related issues in Argyll and Bute. 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.”*

A range of possible actions emerged from the housing summit intended to improve the supply of affordable housing and workforce housing, having the effect of offering more opportunities for young people to stay in their communities or be housed close to their workplace.

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. Figure * shows the family situations where a child is most likely to be in relative poverty.

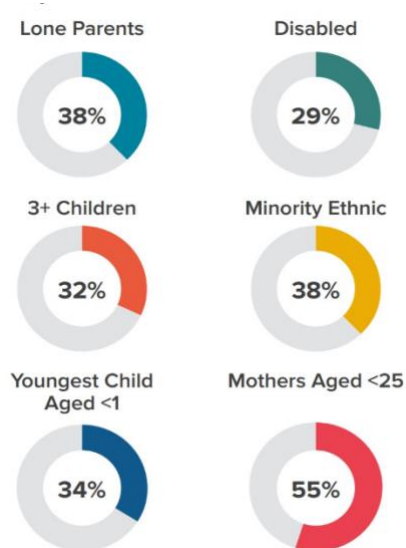


Figure *: Percentage of household types experiencing relative poverty

Source – Scottish Government Child Poverty Strategy

- **Insecure tenancies in the Private Rented Sector** - Many families live in the private rented sector. This sector is often expensive, and tenancies are less secure, with some families living in this sector being pushed into poverty or even homelessness. This is evidenced by the authors of “Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post 2021”, which stated that the largest proportion of those subjected to formal homelessness assessments in Scotland lived in a private rented properties. Scottish 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. Research² suggests that regularly changing schools 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 189 in 2023/24. In 2023/24, 496 homeless cases were closed, of which 106 involved households with dependent children (amounting to 199 children) and 76 of these households received a positive outcome.

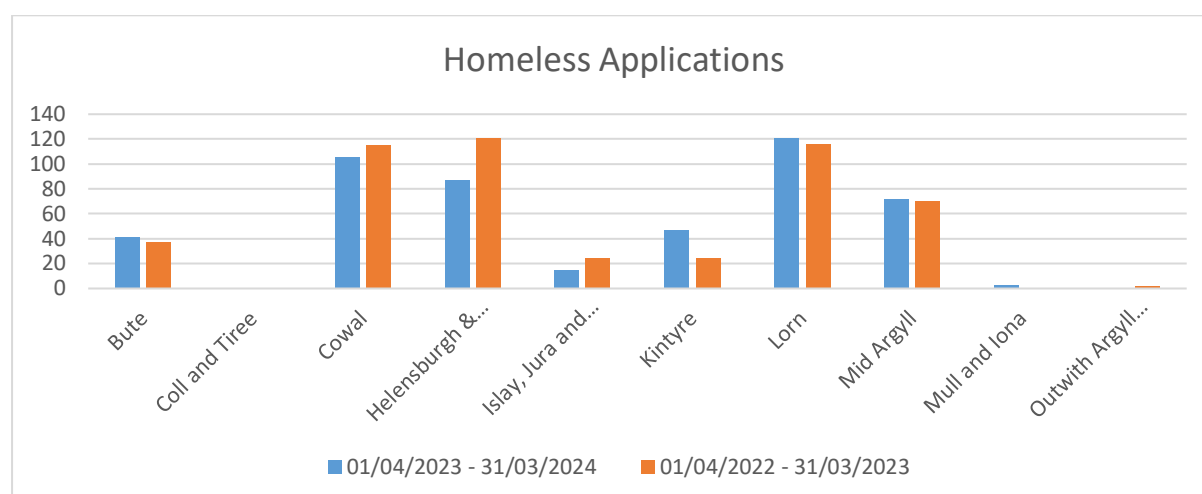
There has been a slight reduction in homeless applications between the 1st of April 2023 and the 31st of March 2024. During that period, 492 homeless applications were made, a decrease of 21 applications (4% down) in the same period in the previous year.

There are currently 246 statutory homeless households waiting for permanent accommodation, with 60 of these households having children in them. The decrease in homeless applications has also seen the number of children in homeless households reduce from 216 children in 2022/23 to 189 in 2023/24.

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

² Between the cracks- Matt Rodda with Joe Hallgarten and John Freeman July 2013. National Association for Education Research Caroline Sharp March 2019

A Bar Chart showing the number of homelessness applications in Argyll and Bute by area from 1st April 2022 to 28th March 2024.



Source: Argyll and Bute Council May 2024

- **Large households** - The Local Housing Strategy aims to provide families with access to housing that is the right size to meet their needs. Research³ 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 2024, of those in housing need with children under 16 years, 128 households on the HOMEArgyll waiting list needed a home with four or more bedrooms. This equates to 18% 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 2024

No of households with children under 16	Minimum bedroom size required
2	One bed
331	Two bed
254	Three bed
128	Four+ bed

Source: HOMEArgyll Common Housing Register March 2024

³ "The Effects of Overcrowded Housing on Children's Performance at School" April 2003 Dominique Goux Eric Maurin. The paper "suggests a relation of cause and effect between living in an overcrowded home and falling behind at school".

- **Families with a disabled family member** - In Argyll and Bute, considerable work is undertaken to meet the needs of families with a disabled member. This includes:
 - In 2023-2024, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) building 12 new homes for particular needs and 7 homes suitable for disabled people who do not require a wheelchair specification home. Though a reduction in number from the previous year, it represents a higher percentage of the overall new stock (27%). As an example of good practice, the new builds at Eton Avenue in Dunoon were preceded by consultation with the tenants regarding their particular needs, which informed the house design and adaptations.
 - 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, as is evidenced in the Eton Avenue project in Dunoon.
 - The number of households seeking advice regarding 'Accommodation Unsuitable – Mobility / Adaptations Issues' has increased from 64 in 2022/23 to 71 in Argyll and Bute from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Housing condition

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.

Jayne Glass and Jane Atterton; Rural Policy Centre, Scotland's Rural College; June 2022

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. Research⁴ suggests a relationship between poor housing and lower educational attainment. Hence, children living in poor housing are more likely to have lower educational attainment, which has a negative impact on children's life chances.

The Council supports discretionary repair and improvement work to private sector properties via the Private Sector Housing Grant. Housing associations carry out

⁴ How are children affected by poor housing? Dawn Foster; NatCen Social Research “People living in bad housing August 2013, Shelter, Matt Barnes; and Chance of a lifetime- The impact of bad housing on children's lives Shelter 2006.

planned cyclical maintenance and improvement works on their stock and deliver necessary adaptations with investment from the Scottish Government.

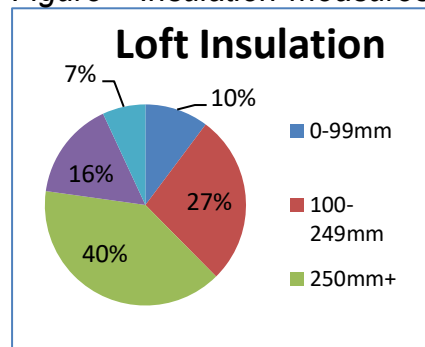
The Council is also currently reviewing its statutory Scheme of Assistance which can fund housing adaptations.

Energy efficiency and affordable warmth

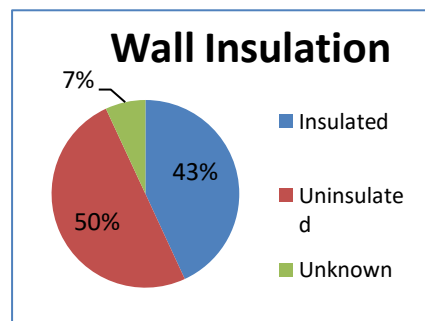
Homes in Argyll and Bute need considerable works to be done to improve insulation measures, as illustrated below:

Two Pie Charts showing percentages of loft and wall insulation in homes in Argyll and Bute.

*Figure * Insulation measures in Argyll and Bute homes as of March 2023 (Source; Home Analytics)*



Only 40% have adequate loft insulation (increase from 33% last year);



Less than 50% have wall insulation

A similar picture emerges when the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings for Argyll and Bute are assessed. Figure * shows that only 30% of homes are rated EPC band C or higher.

A Pie Chart showing homes, in Argyll and Bute, energy performance levels in percentages.

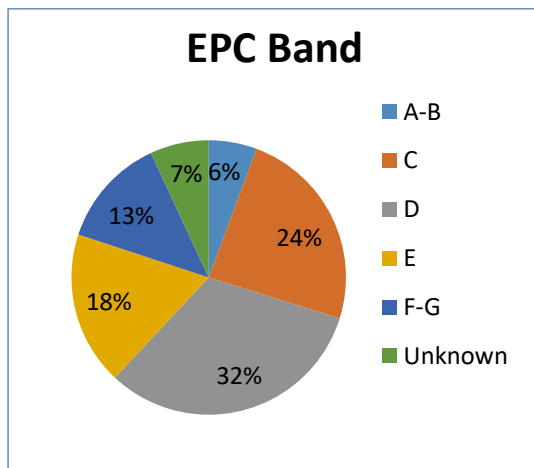
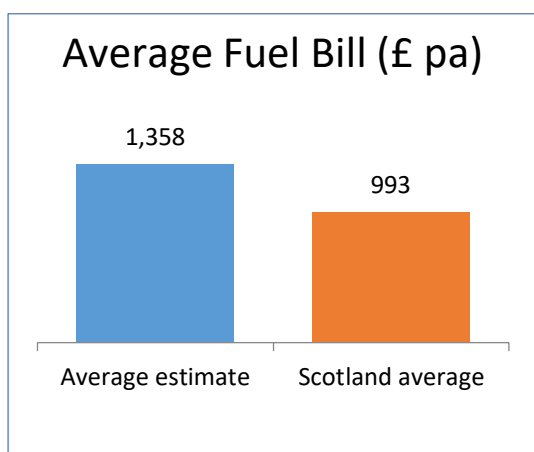


Figure The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings for homes in Argyll and Bute in March 2023 (Source: Home Analytics)*

Poor housing condition, coupled with homes with poor EPC ratings and low insulation levels, create homes requiring a more significant amount of heat to feel comfortable leading to increased day to day living costs, with average energy bills in Argyll and Bute being significantly higher (+37%) than the national average.

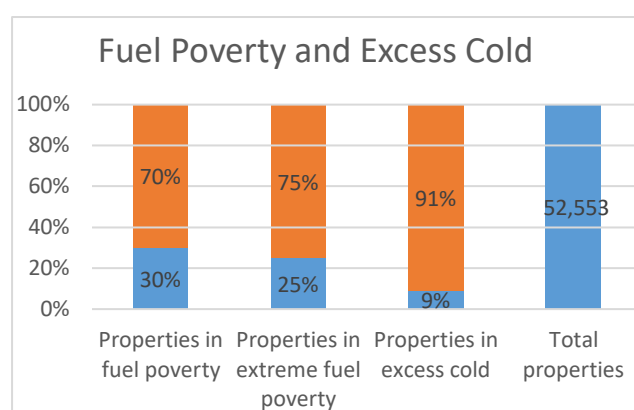
A Pie Chart showing average fuel bills in Argyll and Bute compared to the Scottish average.



*Figure *: Average Fuel Bills in Argyll and Bute and Scotland in March 2023. (Source; Home Analytics)*

Current volatility in fuel costs nationally can be exacerbated in remote and rural areas. High fuel costs combined with homes in Argyll and Bute requiring more heat to feel comfortable than homes in other parts of Scotland have the potential to push many families into poverty.

A Bar Chart showing percentage of household in Argyll and Bute, in fuel Poverty.



*Figure * shows that Argyll and Bute has high levels of fuel poverty, with 30% of households in March 2023 being in fuel poverty and 25% in extreme fuel poverty. (Source; Home Analytics)*

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

The SHIP Programme - Houses developed through the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) are built to the 'Greener Standards', which ensure high energy efficiency levels. Several other energy efficiency measures and initiatives are being developed and piloted within SHIP new builds. From December 2023, homes built through the SHIP programme will have even higher insulation levels than the 'Greener Standard' requires. However, new build homes only account for a small portion of the housing stock.

Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) - To tackle fuel poverty, the Scottish Government has placed a duty on all local authorities to develop a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and delivery plan. The 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 aims to publish its LHEES towards the end of 2024, and will be accompanied by an Action Plan which will clarify roles and responsibilities in achieving the objectives and actions outlined in the strategy, as well as developing a mechanism to deliver activities. 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. £1,979,827 was awarded for the EES - ABS programme for 2023/24, with the current programme running until 30th June 2024, and the full amount projected to be spent.

Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (EESH) - Social housing landlords have been carrying out works in their housing stock to improve their energy efficiency. Most homes owned by social landlords now meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH), with most landlords having over 90% of their stock meeting the standard. In early 2024, the Scottish Government consulted on a proposed new Social Housing Net Zero Standard (SHNZ) which is intended to replace the current EESH standards.

Net-zero standard for social housing - the Scottish Government has recently consulted on a proposed new net zero standard for social housing, intended to ensure that new builds and existing stock meet energy efficiency standards which, while contributing to climate change measures, will also help to reduce the effect that high energy costs have on the overall cost of living.

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.

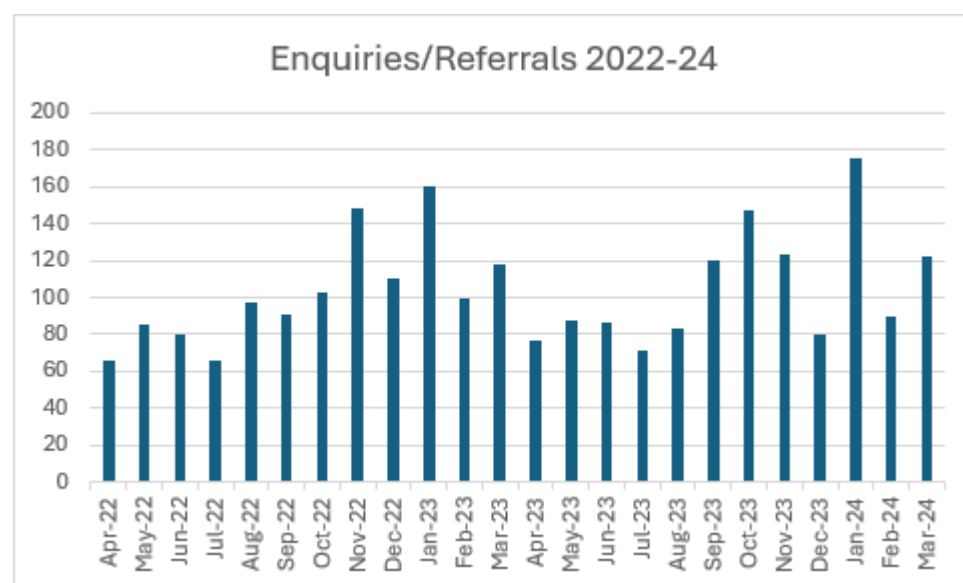
Argyll, Lomond and the Islands Energy Agency (ALlenergy) - Fuel Poverty

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

schemes they are eligible for. The end result is an improvement in household finance, knowledge and understanding, resilience, comfort, health and wellbeing.

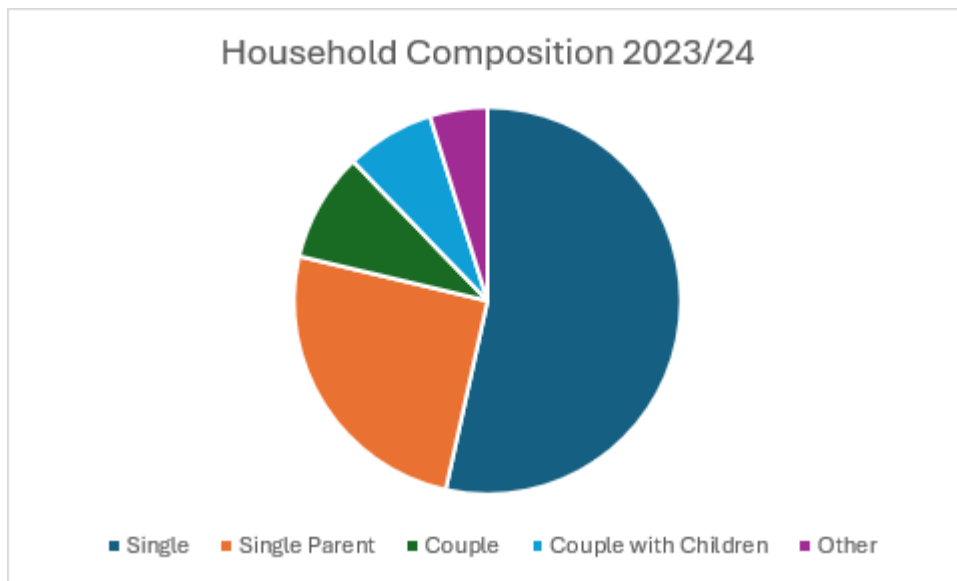
As expected the number of enquiries increased as the colder weather set in. However, in winter 2023-24 we began to see an increase in demand two months earlier than previous years. Many households were suffering from fuel poverty due to unaffordable energy prices. This is a particular problem across our large rural area, as mains gas is mostly not available, and other heating methods are usually significantly more expensive. We also have bad weather, poor housing and low incomes, all of which are challenging. We are seeing a larger number of repeat clients than in previous years, and they are often in a worse state of desperation. We are seeing many more clients who simply can't afford to turn their heating on at all. Many are on prepayment meters which they are unable to top up, and they have suffered severely through the cold winter weather. With the end of the Scottish Government funded Home Heating Support Fund in March 2024, we expect to see households struggle in 2024-25 as there are still high rates of fuel poverty. Families are reporting they are worried about the summer school holidays as children will be at home on devices and they will be cooking more.

A Bar Chart showing the level of referrals over months



In 2023-24 a third of the households seeking help with energy had children in the home, a quarter of ALLenergy's clients were single parents.

A Pie Chart showing family composition of referrals.



On average, we calculate the client gains achieved in 2023-24 to be worth an average of at least £500 per client, in a combination of accurately measured crisis intervention funds (£200) and other estimated savings (£300). Estimated savings are a combination of factors such as: lower bills as a result of behavioural changes; switching to new energy efficient appliances; changing tariffs or meters; installation of new technologies/ gadgets; ensuring all clients receive all discounts and schemes they are eligible for; onward referrals for benefit checks, financial advice, Scottish Government funded insulation or new heating installs.

In 2023-24 ALLenergy's total client gain was over £269,373. The Scottish Government funded Home Heating Support Fund granted £168,189 to ALLenergy clients to help with fuel debt and ongoing costs. ALLenergy secured £26,617 in pre-payment vouchers from the Fuel Bank Foundation and £19,404 in pre-payment vouchers from the British Gas Energy Trust. Referrals were made to ECO4 which resulted in client gains of £19,200 from capital work to improve the energy efficiency and annual bill savings. A total of £21,731 was secured from the Glasspool Trust for white goods. A further £14,232 was secured through several funds including Children in Need, Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund, Fuel Bank Heat Fund, Live Well and Warm Home Discount.

ALLenergy continue to work with Argyll & Bute Council, Bute Advice Centre and the Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum to deliver Argyll & Bute Council's Flexible Food & Fuel Fund. Since the launch of the fund in January 2020 the client gain has reached £3.8 million to the end of March 2024.

Training and Information Sessions Delivered

- Allenergy and Bute Advice Centre co-hosted Information Sessions to raise awareness of the Flexible Food & Fuel Fund, Welfare Benefits support from Bute Advice Centre and fuel poverty support from Allenergy. These sessions were targeted to professionals working with children and families including Argyll & Bute Family Liaison Officers, Midwives and Health Visitors. Uptake was positive with 22 midwives and health visitors attending online and the Family Liaison Officer session was recorded for dissemination. Allenergy hosted Fuel Poverty Awareness sessions targeting Social Workers, Health Professionals, Citizens Advice Staff & Volunteers, Argyll & Bute Council Welfare Rights Team, Household Resilience Advocates, Community Link Workers and Mental Health Professionals where 110 professionals attended online.
- Allenergy attended the Kirn Primary School Community Café @TheKirk, a session hosted by Kirn Primary's Family Liaison Officer Laura Mitchell who said:

“Rachel and Lena have been so helpful to our parents with Energy Advice and Financial Fuel Support through our Kirn Café at the Kirk, the Cafe was set up for parents to have a safe warm space to meet up for a chat on a weekly basis.

Allenergy have had 2 drop in sessions where they have set up all their information and made themselves available for parents to talk to and fill in an enquiry form. They also have brought with them some free items for parents to take home to keep them warm i.e. socks, blankets and hot water bottle. In the colder months I know the parents were very grateful for these items.

Kirn Primary appreciate these drop in sessions Lena and Rachel provide for our families. Many thanks.”

- Allenergy delivered energy support to 86 families receiving help from the Parental Employment Support Fund throughout 2023-24.

Looking to 2024-25, Allenergy will continue to support families in fuel poverty through our various funded projects including the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund and Parental Employability Support Fund Programme. A major concern for our team is clients who rely on the radio-teleswitch to control their electricity meters as the technology will be switched off in June 2025. To remedy any disruption these meters will need to be replaced with smart meters offering the same functionality. At present suppliers are testing suitable meters so there is a lot of worry that meters will not be ready in time and there won't be enough time to get all the required meters installed (around 250,000 across Scotland). As much of Argyll and Bute is off the gas grid and people rely on electric heating with Total Heat Total Control meters and tariffs this will cause a great deal of worry for householders as there is potential their heating and hot water will be left on the last received signal-on or off. We expect to see an increase in enquiries and referrals for this issue.

School Clothing Banks

The South Kintyre scheme has 8 participating primary schools & nurseries. In Year 1 a total of 586 items were donated. 55 orders were placed for 322 items supporting 72 families which is equivalent to 1 in 7 children being supported.

In Year 2 the delivery plan is to increase the impact of the project. Try to encourage more schools to engage in the project including the wider area. Normalise reuse so that it becomes the norm to wear pre loved clothing and remove any stigma. Continue to promote the scheme and work with our partners to maximise the project.

A community development officer is collaborating with schools to streamline the process of requesting uniforms, aiming to make it as convenient as possible for families.

Free Period Products

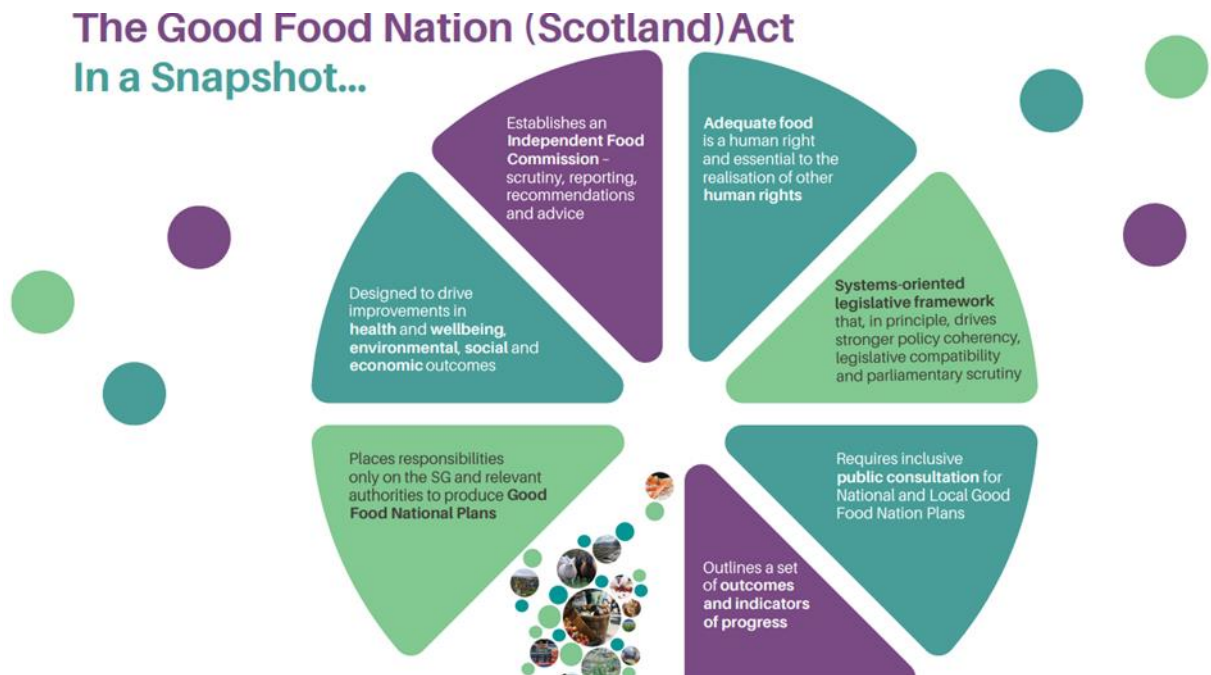
Argyll and Bute's free period product initiative, My Tribe continues to run across Argyll and Bute. Products are available in over 250 locations, with free online ordering and delivery to any household in Argyll and Bute. Period products are available in over 30 primary schools across the area, and all the secondary schools, with the My Tribe Champions initiative running independently in a number secondary schools.

A consultation was carried out in 2023, this showed that overall awareness of the My Tribe initiative continues to grow, with a 65% increase in awareness from 2022 to 2023. Over 90% of young people who took part in the survey were aware of period products being freely available to them. Across the board, the most popular way to access products was through the My Tribe website, followed by accessing within schools.

The My Tribe team have been working on technical improvements to make monitoring, evaluating and managing the initiative easier, with improvements made in ease of access to products online.

Free School Meals and Holiday Provision

A chart showing what the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act says.



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, and from February 2025 children in P6 and P7 in receipt of the Scottish child payment will also be entitled to a free school meal. 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 which came into effect in April 2021. 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 new pre-ordering app,

each child should also be able to have their preferred meal every day at lunchtime, while enabling conversations with parents around meal choices to become normalised. The Council's Catering Service continues to hold its Soil Association Food for Life Served Here Award at Bronze level, 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 as a result of EU Exit, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine continue to put significant pressure on both public sector food provision and on household finances.

Paid for School Meals

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.

Good Food Nation and Food Strategy

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

The scope of the Good Food Nation Act is broad, and will draw together a number of other plans, including the Child Poverty Action Plan, with a food lens, along with education, health and wellbeing, and other priority areas. In addition to the scope of this Act covering child poverty, one of the key principles of the Act is that adequate food is a human right. The draft Good Food Nation Plan was published in January 2024 for public consultation. The final plan is expected to be published in early 2025, which will be followed by the development of the Local Good Food Nation Plan in Argyll and Bute.

D. Helping Families in Other Ways

Working with Refugees in Argyll and Bute

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

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

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

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

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

Since the start of 2024 Afghan families have been resettled in Helensburgh through the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP). The (ARAP) scheme was launched by the UK government in April 2021 and works with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to relocate current and former Locally Employed Staff who worked with the British Forces in Afghanistan and identified to be at serious risk of threat to life. All those who are resettled through ARAP scheme benefit from full rights and entitlements through Indefinite Leave to Remain, providing them with the certainty and stability they need to build their life here. The local authority receive integration tariff over 3 years to provide ongoing integration support. In addition there is funding available in year 1 for education, adult ESOL and healthcare. As per all resettlement schemes, support is person centred and multi-agency.

We have 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.

Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface

Warm Spaces

The Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface has set up a Positive Destinations Programme. They believe that with guidance and help, volunteering can change people's lives. The programme aims to reduce barriers to personal development, education, and employment. Participants receive six-month volunteering placements in Argyll and Bute, with a dedicated mentor to guide them. This experience enhances confidence, social skills, and overall well-being, while reducing stress and improving mental health.

<https://www.argylltsi.org/positive-destinations/>

The Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface (TSI) has produced a comprehensive list of Warm Spaces throughout the region where people can gather, stay warm, and connect. These spaces are open to the public or available for organisational meetings to help reduce heating costs.

<https://www.argylltsi.org/warm-spaces/>

They have also created a Community Directory which shows hundreds of charities and organisations that offer crucial services that serve and support their communities. These may be a befriending service for those dealing with rural isolation or a support service for parents struggling with the cost of living or maybe a knitting and natter group that allows people to meet others.

<https://abcd.scot/>

Cool 2 Talk

Cool 2 Talk is a safe space for young people age 12 up to 25 years old living in Argyll and Bute to get questions answered accurately and without judgment within 24 hours visit <https://cool2talk.org/>

Cool2talk is not an emergency service. If you need an immediate response, please contact Child line on 0800 1111 or the Samaritans on 116 123.

A Picture showing young people at a bus stop, thinking about things that worry them.



Re-Store Oban

This is an example of one of the many initiatives that are happening across Argyll and Bute to tackle the impacts of the cost of living crisis. The shop is part of the work of five charities in Oban, some of whom are already working with families to tackle child poverty (these are Hope Kitchen, Healthy Options, ALLenergy, Atlantis and Oban Youth Cafe).

The Workshop-part of Re-Store is going to be running a range of workshops over the year, all on a pay-what-you-can basis. They'll focus on increasing people's confidence in mending and repurposing clothes and homeware. Regarding tackling child poverty in particular, the most relevant will probably be us running free workshops around the holidays, e.g. for making Halloween costumes, and so on. On a more general note, we are keeping prices in the shop very low precisely to keep it affordable so that individuals and families can access good quality clothing, toys and other things at accessible rates. We're also in the process of setting up a rescued food hub which will also see people accessing very affordable food while reducing food waste.

E. Other Planned Work

Vibrant and Living Spaces Grant to Council – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Argyll and Bute Council has launched the Vibrant & Living Spaces Grant, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

Argyll and Bute Council has been allocated £304,642 to support the creation and improvement of living spaces.



[Visit the Invest in Argyll website for an application form and guidance document.](#)

The main objectives of the fund are to support capital projects which create or improve:

- green or blue space;
- community facilities and amenities; or
- cultural, heritage and tourism assets.

Applications will be considered from:

- Community, voluntary and not for profit organisations based in Argyll and Bute

The Council will award grants from £10,000 - £50,000 to eligible organisations that support activities that deliver UKSPF objectives. Funding is limited to 'capital' expenditure only. Deadline: Friday 23rd February 2024 at 17:00pm.

For further information, please contact: Transformation Projects and Regeneration Team.

Investinargyll@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Engaging With Governments Proposed Depopulation Plan

Councillors have agreed to continue to engage with the Scottish Government for further investment in Argyll and Bute communities facing depopulation, particularly

affordable housing, digital and transport connectivity and more employment opportunities.

Councillors considered the Scottish Government's Depopulation Action Plan at a meeting of the Full Council and agreed there is a need for greater focus on more radical actions, coupled with greater resources, to reverse negative population trends. Argyll and Bute is one of 14 local authorities in Scotland with declining populations.

Appendix One.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework:

To understand why variations in cost and performance are occurring, councils work together to 'drill-down' into the benchmarking data across service areas. This process has been organised around 'family groups' of councils so that we are comparing councils that are similar in terms of the type of population that they serve (e.g. relative deprivation and affluence) and the type of area in which they serve them (e.g. urban, semi-rural, rural). The point of comparing like with like is that this is more likely to lead to useful learning and improvement.

For councils grouped by the type of population they serve, e.g. level of deprivation and affluence, Argyll and Bute is in Family Group 2 which consists of:

Moray
Stirling
East Lothian
Angus
Scottish Borders
Highland
Argyll & Bute
Midlothian

For councils grouped by the type of area they serve, e.g. rural, semi-rural and urban, Argyll and Bute is in Family Group 1 which consists of:

Eilean Siar
Argyll & Bute
Shetland Islands
Highland
Orkney Islands
Scottish Borders
Dumfries & Galloway
Aberdeenshire

A Table showing how Argyll and Bute compares with other, similar, benchmarking areas. Benefits, employment, school leavers, weekly earnings, and child poverty rates, in 2023.

Indicator	Argyll and Bute (%)	Average Family Group 2 (%)
% of Children in Child Poverty	21.7	22.7 NOTE - Scottish average is 22.6%
% of Children in Low Income Families	17.8	18.5
% of Households on Universal Credit	10.1	14.4
% of Households that are Workless	13.5	18.9
% of School Leavers in Positive Destination	96.4	95.8
% Economically Inactive: long term sick / disabled rate	25.9	35.1
% Employment Rate	74.7	74.2
% Employment in Low Pay Sectors	32.5	29.1
% Gender Employment Gap (%difference between male and female employment rates)	4.9	6.4
% under-employment Rate	8.1	9.4
Satisfactory Hours % of employees	81.4	83.6
Median Weekly Earnings (Residence Based – Full-Time)	586.3	636.2

Appendix 2

Plans that the Child Poverty Action Plan 2023-2024 aligns to

Argyll and Bute HSCP Joint Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025

Argyll and Bute Children and Young People's Service Plan 2023 - 2026

Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan 2020-2034

Argyll and Bute Community Justice Plan 2017 - 2022

Argyll and Bute Corporate Parenting Plan 2021 – 2024

Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership Delivery Plan, 2022-25

Argyll and Bute Education Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024

Argyll and Bute Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2022-2027

Argyll and Bute Children's Rights Plan 2020-2023 Review