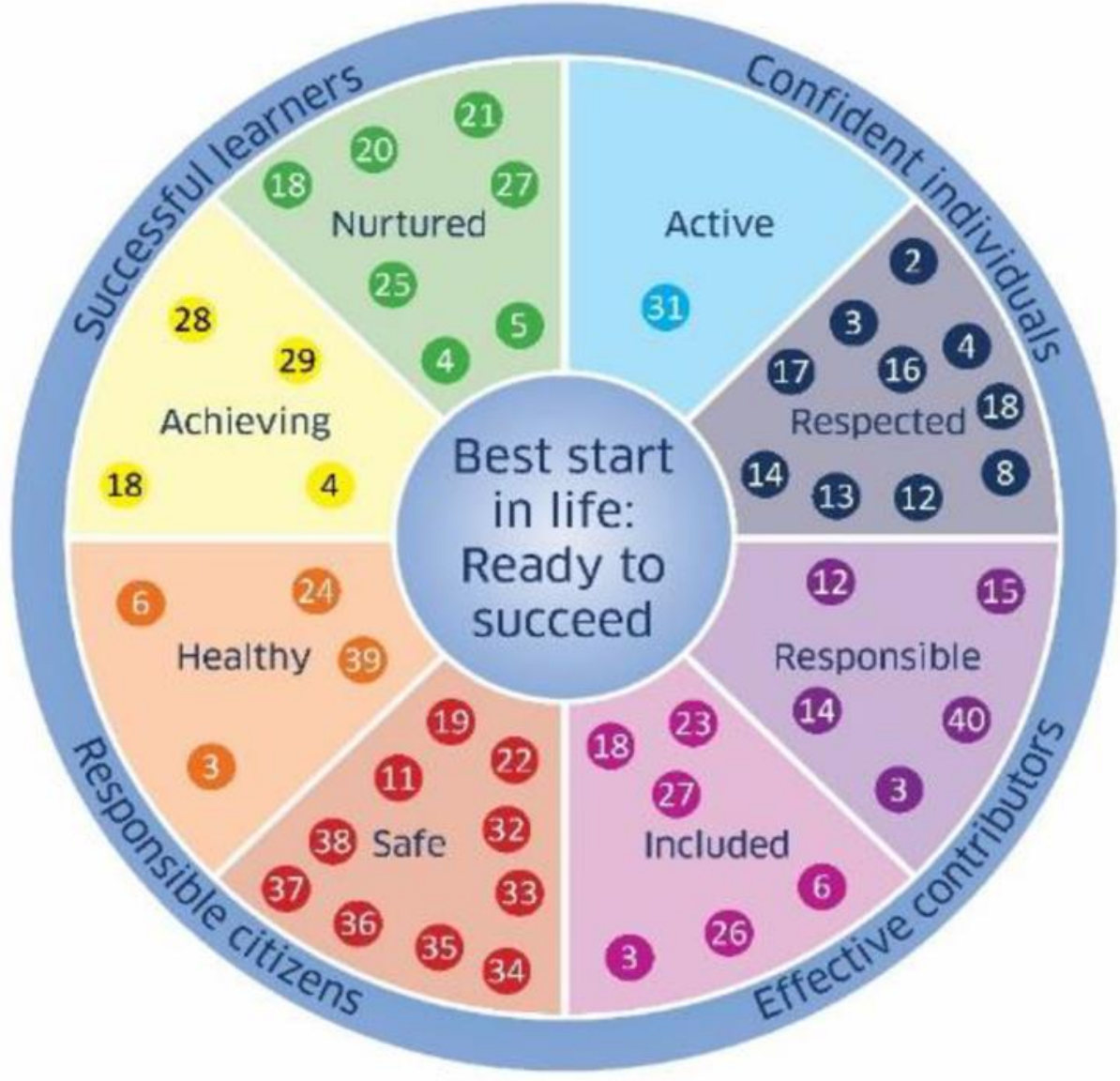
Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan Review 2019-20

November 2020



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Foreword

Argyll and Bute benefits from supportive communities and an enviable environment for children to grow up in. Despite our idyllic setting Child Poverty is a reality.

In 2020 the impact of Covid-19 has further impacted on families and communities, increasing the risk of poverty and with that the impacts that poverty brings.

In this first review of the Argyll and Bute Child Poverty Action Plan, it outlines the work undertaken so far. The plan is an agreed multi-agency approach to tackling poverty and the causes of poverty in Argyll and Bute.

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

We are aligned in our desire to see our local children access the best opportunities to support them to develop their potential and as adults continue to live and work in a vibrant Argyll and Bute.

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

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Introduction

In 2017 the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act came into force as an attempt to put in place measures that would reduce the concerning increase in child poverty, both on a national and local level. 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 key reason for these projected rises was seen as the announced UK Government cuts, primarily the benefit freeze and the two child limit on tax credits.

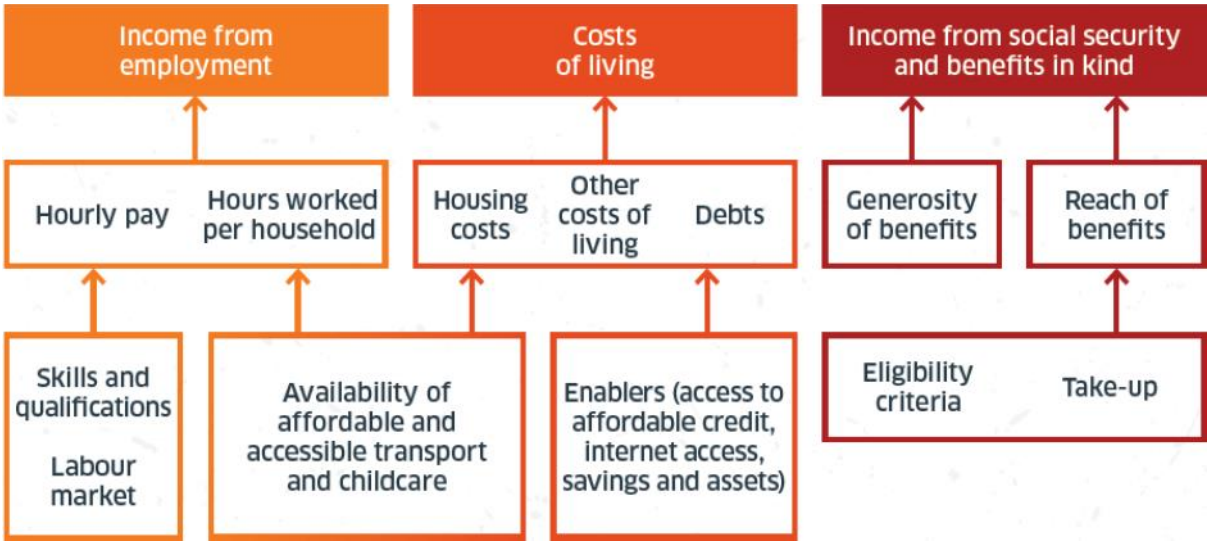
The 2017 Act set into in law four targets relating to ending child poverty, which the Scottish Government committed to trying to achieve by 2030. The targets for children living in households in Scotland are that:

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

These are all measured after housing costs are deducted. The Act also sets out interim targets which are to be met in the financial year beginning 1 April 2023.

The Scottish Government produced its national Child Poverty Action Plan and, in June 2019, all 32 Scottish Council areas produced their own local Child Poverty Action Plans. Local action plans, as with the national one, were based primarily on identifying measures to combat the three drivers of poverty:

Income through employment, income through benefits and the cost of living.



They also looked at measures to alleviate the impact of poverty on children and families. It was acknowledged that there were limited funds to create new projects and actions but Councils, Health Boards and their partners were encouraged to work closely together to come up with new ideas and fresh ways of using available resources in order to meet the Scottish Government's ambitious targets for the reduction of child poverty by 2023 and 2030. Plans would look at what was already happening across Scotland and what future work was planned; becoming road maps to show how child poverty would be tackled.

Argyll and Bute, in line with other local authorities, published its first Local Child Poverty Action Report in June 2019.

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

The report acknowledged the challenges presented by Argyll and Bute being the second largest local authority in Scotland at 690, 899 hectare and also the third most sparsely populated area with only 13 people per square kilometre or 0.13 per hectare compared to the Scottish average of 0.70 and along with its five towns it included 23 inhabited islands.

Demographic challenges were acknowledged with the National Records of Scotland office stating in March 2020 that between 2018 and 2028, the population of Argyll and Bute is projected to decrease from 86,260 to 81,197. This is a decrease of 5.9%, with the biggest

decrease coming in the 0-19 age group. This can be compared to a projected increase of 1.8% for Scotland as a whole.

The plan also noted that areas of deprivation existed; in recent figures the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 noted that Argyll and Bute contained 10.4% of the 20% most deprived Data Areas in Scotland and 11.2% of the 20% most income deprived data zones. Overall data from the charity "End Child Poverty" last published in May 2019, estimated Argyll and Bute as having 20% of children living in poverty (All poverty rates are calculated on an after housing costs basis. Households are living in poverty if their household income [adjusted to account for household size] is less than 60% of the median household income).

The figures by ward were as follows:

Ward	% of children in poverty
Cowal	21%
South Kintyre	21%
Dunoon	27%
Lomond North	22%
Oban South and the Isles	21%
Isle of Bute	26%
Oban North and Lorn	18%
Helensburgh and Lomond South	15%
Kintyre and the Islands	19%
Helensburgh Central	19%
Mid Argyll	16%

www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2019

The Department of Work and Pensions looked at child poverty figures **before housing costs** and found the following:

	Children in Poverty 2014 / 2015	Children in Poverty 2018 / 2019	Percentage Point Increase
Scotland	14.5%	18.1%	3.6%
Argyll and Bute	13.4%	17.3%	3.9%

Comparison of the figures suggests that housing costs are a key factor when considering factors contributing to child poverty. In addition they would suggest that whilst rates of child poverty in Argyll and Bute remain below the national average for Scotland, they may be increasing at a faster rate. The Covid19 crisis may turn out to have further fuelled this increase because some areas of Argyll and Bute have a considerable dependence on the Tourist Industry.

We looked in detail at the workers in the tourism sector, which is one of the most directly affected by restrictions. Pre-crisis, they were on one of the lowest paid sectors with an average take-home income that was around 15% lower than the Scottish average, and a poverty rate of 28% which is much higher than the Scottish average of 19%. For children with parents who work in the sector, the poverty rate was 41% compared to the Scottish average of 24%.

The Poverty Alliance in their Anti-Poverty Review, summer 2020; p15

Lone parents may be particularly affected by this as a third of lone parents work in sectors, such as tourism, that experienced shutdown. The vast majority of lone parents are women, and are more likely to be living in poverty. (Close The Gap, 2020; Improvement Service, 2020a). There are a significant number of lone parent families living in Argyll and Bute. On 23 October 2020 there was a live caseload covering Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction of 849 single parent families which represents 11.5% of the overall caseload.

It is also clear that families with children, as a whole, are experiencing increased financial difficulties in 2020.

Number of Crisis Grants where there were children recorded as household members:

	No. of Claims	**No. of Children**
01/04/19 – 30/09/2019	93	159
01/04/2020 – 30/09/2020	128	243
Difference in No.	35	84
Difference in %	27.34%	34.57%

Government statistics for Argyll and Bute, looking at children under the age of 16 living in families in relative and absolute poverty found the following:

1. Number and percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in relative low income families.

Year	Number	Percentage
2014 - 2015	1,823	13
2015 - 2016	1,825	14
2016 - 2017	2,094	16
2017 - 2018	2,266	17
2018 - 2019	2,254	17

2. Number and percentage of children (aged 16 and under) living in absolute low income families.

Year	Number	Percentage
2014 - 2015	1,817	13
2015 - 2016	1,722	13
2016 - 2017	1,757	13
2017 - 2018	1,866	14
2018 - 2019	1,877	14

These statistics are produced at a national level. Due to a data lag the 2019-2020 statistics are not available. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-201415-to-201819 specifically within

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895808/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-15-to-2018-19.ods

The Connection between Poverty and Domestic Abuse:

In Scotland, as is the case all over the World, domestic abuse very often goes hand in hand with financial abuse. Financial abuse is a form of coercive control and is an offence under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. It prevents women having the resources to leave violent relationships and being able to support themselves and their children.

One answer to the old question: 'Why doesn't she just leave?' becomes evident when we look at the statistics: for the vast majority of women, economic abuse happens alongside other forms of domestic abuse. This may include coercive control of finances (97% of domestic abuse victims), sabotage - such as the abuser showing up at the woman's workplace or making her late to undermine her job - (89%), and financial exploitation

(87%). There are many reasons why women don't leave violent relationships, and fear for their safety and their children's is one of the biggest. But financial insecurity also looms large in women's decision-making….. Disabled women will face additional barriers to leaving services, transport and available adapted homes, but also because their abusive partner is often their carer.

Domestic Abuse is an Economic Issue - for its Victims and for Society; CPAG; Dr Sara Reis; 06/12/2019

Living in a remote place can also be used to increase financial control and prevent women fleeing domestic abuse. In Argyll and Bute we have many remote places, including 23 inhabited islands.

Financial control, removal from friends, isolation from family are all well understood tools of abuse. .. The more rural the greater the impact of this isolation, which is now geographic and tangible, sitting alongside financial and social isolation.

Captive and Controlled; Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas; Rural Crime Network Report 2019

Becoming a single parent is another factor that impacts on women fleeing domestic abuse. Around 230,000 children were living in relative poverty in Scotland before the covid19 crisis. Of these, 90,000 were in lone-parent families; mostly headed by women. In Argyll and Bute the connection between poverty and domestic abuse is recognised and there are resources targeted at assisting women and children. The Housing Consortium has policies that will offer priority and support to women fleeing domestic violence and there are organisations such as Women's Aid, Rape Crisis and ASSIST who have specialist workers who can offer emotional and practical support. This is very necessary because the covid19 pandemic has seen a concerning rise in levels of domestic abuse. The figures for Argyll and Bute Women's Aid on 26/10/2020 showed that:

- 174 Women were being supported
- 64 of whom were living under extreme financial difficulties (37%)
- 131 children lived in those 64 families and faced poverty daily.

On that date last year (26/10/19) there were 106 women's cases open

Anecdotally staff felt that the volume of cases where extreme financial pressure existed had increased greatly during COVID.

The Council has produced a webpage that gives women advice and links to a range of services that they might need and this will include money advice: www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/advice-services. Domestic abuse is unacceptable and in Argyll and Bute the Violence against Women and Girls Partnership, a multi-agency group (including health, education, third sector, employability, benefits, housing and social work) is working to try and ensure women and children that they do not fall into poverty as a result.

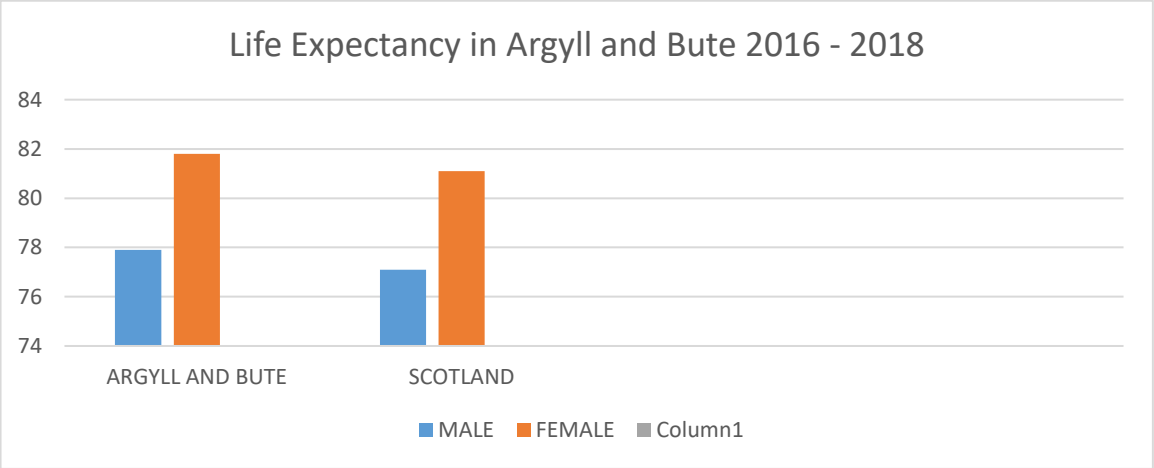
Alongside the challenges there are also some advantages and benefits to living in Argyll and Bute, some of these included:

- Argyll and Bute is a place of outstanding natural beauty.
- We have a lower child poverty rate than the Scottish national average.
- In 2018 Argyll and Bute Schools were above the current national performance in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in all four of the national measures; National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. In 2019 pupils in academic year 2018/19 i.e.
    - National 4 results are above the national outcome by 11.50% in 2019.
    - ii. National 5 results are above the national outcome by 1.2% in 2019.
    - iii. Higher results are below the national outcome by -1.6% in 2019. There is a national dip in the 2019 higher results.
    - iv. Advanced Higher results are below the national outcome by -3.7% in 2019.

Nomis, official labour market figures show that between Jan 2019 – Dec 2019 Argyll and Bute's population scored more highly in terms of qualifications than both the Scottish and UK average in most respects.

	Argyll and Bute Level	Argyll and Bute %	Scotland %	Great Britain %
NVQ4 and Above	22,300	44.6	45.3	40.3
NVQ3 and Above	31,300	62.6	60.8	58.5
NVQ2 and Above	39,300	78.6	75.6	75.6
NVQ1 and Above	44,400	88.8	83.5	85.6
Other Qualifications	2,00	4.0	6.7	6.7
No Qualifications	3,600	7.2	9.8	7.7

- **In Argyll and Bute, life expectancy at birth is higher than at Scotland level for both females and males. (Argyll and Bute Council Area Profile; National Records of Scotland; April 2020.)**



- **Business survival rates in Argyll and Bute are better** and survival rates increased from 63.5 to 64.4 per cent, compared with a 2.4 percentage point reduction for Scotland (which had a business survival rate of 60.4 per cent in 2018/19). (Best Value Assurance Report; Argyll and Bute; Audit Scotland May 2020).

Our Vision:

Whilst acknowledging the challenges and the need to work in partnership to tackle child poverty in Argyll and Bute, the plan was able to set out a clear vision of what we wanted to achieve:

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.

This is supported by the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and its six long term outcomes that in Argyll and Bute:

www.argyllbute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/aboip_v1_2017.pdf

1. The economy is diverse and thriving.
2. We have infrastructure that supports sustainable growth.
3. Education, skills and training maximises opportunities for all.
4. Children and young people have the best possible start.
5. People live active, healthier and independent lives.
6. People live in safer and stronger communities.

Children's Rights:

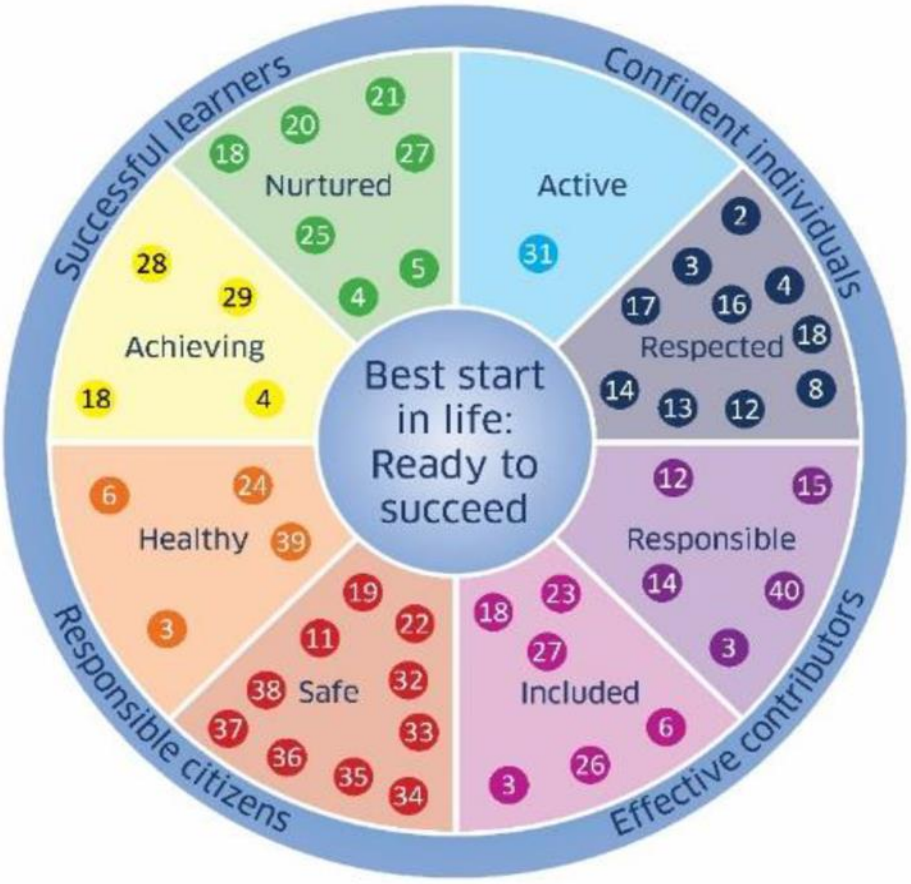
Since creating this first vision statement Argyll and Bute, other local authorities and the Scottish Government have committed to putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the centre of decision making both politically and legally. On the 1st of September 2020 the First Minister announced a UNCRC Incorporation Bill as part of Scotland's 2020/21 Programme for Government. This Bill looks to put the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law to the maximum extent possible.

In Scotland Government Ministers currently have a duty to promote public awareness and understanding of the rights of children under Part 1 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Local Authorities and Health Boards have a duty to report back every three years on the steps each has taken to secure better or further effect of UNCRC requirements under s.2 and Schedule 1 of the 2014 Act.

In 2020 Argyll and Bute produced its own Children's Rights Report and will use its principles when tackling child poverty. This will demonstrate a commitment to the articles of the UNCRC and delivering them through The Getting it Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) assessment approach, which encompasses 8 Wellbeing Indicators (safe, Healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included). GIRFEC recognises that all children are unique and that each child should be helped to reach their full potential. A range of experiences can have negative effects on young people; these are recognised in the work on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or other adversities such as bereavement or bullying, or where a family is affected by illness, disability or poverty.

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

The UNCRC Articles that apply to the Wellbeing Indicators (SHANARRI):



In our original Child Poverty Action Plan we said that we would complete Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (EQIA's) to ensure that the Fairer Scotland Duty, part one of the Equality Act 2010, informs our decision making in a clear and transparent way and that all our strategic decisions have due regard to: eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the 2010 Act. In completing EQIA's we would also fulfil our duties under the Island Scotland Act 2018 and consider the impact of our strategies, policies and service provisions on the populations of 23 inhabited islands of Argyll and Bute.

In this Review Report we confirm that we will continue to tackle child poverty and its impacts on children and families by the use of impact assessments. In connection with children's rights and the UNCRC we will also now commit to carrying out Children's Rights and Wellbeing Assessments (CRWIA's) in conjunction with EQIA's in order to ensure that we identify all and any impacts on children, young people and their rights and wellbeing caused by any plans, polices or actions of the Council, Health Board or partner agencies. Subsequent decision will then be made with children's rights and child poverty taken into consideration.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.174658018.1999023234.1593702630-61273816.1593702630

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; in child friendly language

https://sites.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchilldfriendlylanguage.pdf

Covid 19:

On the 23rd of March 2020 it was announced that lockdown conditions would commence across the UK in order to prevent the spread of the Corona Virus. People's lives were impacted on immediately as they were compelled to stay at home and abide by restrictions; some families, those already experiencing poverty and living on benefits or low and insecure wages, would find this more of a challenge. Public Health Scotland said that: "Around 230,000 children were living in relative poverty in Scotland before this crisis. Of these, 90,000 were in lone-parent families (headed predominantly by women)."

https://publichealthscotland.scot/

Argyll and Bute Council and its partners immediately took action to organise a response that would support communities and individuals, particularly those who were already seen to be vulnerable or disadvantaged. These actions included:

- Tactical Command Groups were set up and met on a daily basis to ensure fast and coordinated approaches to the challenges of covid19. These along with a newly established "Caring for People Tactical Partnership" ensured that safety / advice and resource messages got to children and families quickly.

- The Caring for People Tactical Partnership, comprised of NHS Highland, Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll and Bute HSCP and Third Sector Interface staff, was formed to coordinate the urgent community response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local communities across Argyll and Bute had already started to mobilise and form local resilience groups, to protect those most at risk from COVID in the community. The Caring for People group brought together many of these groups to provide guidance and ensure that no area was uncovered and no one was left behind. A helpline was set up for people who were self-isolating/vulnerable and whose usual support network was not available. This was to ensure that everyone had access to food, essential supplies and other necessary support. Local Caring for People teams were established, and worked with existing resilience groups and a network of volunteers to arrange for food delivery, other essential shopping supplies and medication

delivery. The Caring for People helpline supported over 3400 people and took over 5500 calls, with over 500 calls a week during the busiest period.

Over 990 people in Argyll and Bute registered to volunteer as part of the Caring for People community response.

https://sway.office.com/Dw2xKno7aogbLmcL?ref=Link

- Caring for people developed leaflets on where to go for help, money worries, and general wellbeing. These were distributed to all households in Argyll and Bute via Royal Mail, recognising that issues such as digital exclusion and low income could be a barrier to people from accessing information online (example below). Partners such as the Scottish Fire & Rescue Services helped to move leaflets across Argyll and Bute so that they could be sent out with food parcels. Other resources were also developed, such as guidance on how to volunteer safely and a website with information about businesses and groups who were helping locally.

- The group supported those who were asked to shield and worked with the newly formed **Community Food Group** to ensure that food was available and accessible to all. By the end of July this group had delivered a total of 44,811 fresh and ambient parcels to vulnerable, shielding and free school meal households across Argyll and Bute since the crisis began. Over 3000 people in Argyll and Bute were registered as shielding and statistics published by COSLA recognise the exceptional effort within Argyll and Bute to get in contact with those shielding and check their needs. This was undertaken by the Customer Contact Centre and a number of teams including Caring for People then worked together to ensure needs have been fulfilled.

- Caring for People understood this emergency was having an impact on mental health and wellbeing. The Helpline could therefore put people who feel lonely in touch with others to provide a friendly ear and if people are experiencing mental health problems they could also be directed to a range of services where they can get help.

Looking after your Health and Wellbeing

Keep Active - Now more than ever, it's essential to keep active. Being active can enhance your mood, wellbeing and energy levels by helping to reduce stress, anxiety and depression. NHS Inform is an excellent resource for tips on health and wellbeing.

www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/

Mental Wellbeing - If you're finding things hard emotionally right now, you're not alone. There are lots of things you can do to benefit your wellbeing at this time.

clearyourhead.scot/

Emotional Support - Are you feeling anxious or stressed?

To find out about a range of local and national support and services to help you cope contact the Emotional Support Service via the Caring for People Helpline Tel: **01546 605524** Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm or complete a request form online - **https://argyllandbute.custhelp.com/app/VOL/Help_Request**

Having trouble keeping kids amused? -

For some useful tips visit **www.parentclub.scot**

Money Worries? - Are you worried about how to cope financially at the moment?

Citizens Advice Bureau give independent financial advice **www.abcab.org.uk** Email: **info@abcab.org.uk** or Tel: **01546 605550** Mon - Fri 10am-1pm/2pm-4pm

Scottish Welfare Fund provides emergency **Crisis** or **Community Care** Grants:

A **Crisis Grant** can be awarded to cover:
- Immediate short-term living expenses needed until their next income is due because of an emergency.
- Where a person is stranded, costs for accommodation in a hostel.
- Travel costs in case of an emergency.
- Living expenses or items where the need has arisen due to a disaster.

A **Community Care Grant** can be used to:
- Support families facing exceptional pressure.

These grants do not need to be paid back. Tel: **01546 605511**

or apply online at: **www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/about-scottish-welfare-fund**

If you wish to have this information produced in another format or in another language, please contact: High-UHB.ABHealthImprovement@nhs.net

- **Hub Schools** were quickly established to ensure care for the children of key workers and vulnerable children and these worked well throughout lockdown allowing health, social care and other key frontline workers to continue in their posts. A food group was formed that ensured that all children who were entitled to free school meals continued to get food support as did their wider families if necessary. Children were assisted when shielding by multi-agency wraparound support to them and their families.

- Argyll and Bute continues to be one of three areas in Scotland leading the way in developing a **trauma informed workforce**. As part of this we have developed and collated a range of easy to use on line learning materials for everyone in the children's services workforce to help support the different groups of staff who come into contact with children and families as part of their job. This training was used to advise and inform workers dealing with children and families experiencing trauma during and following lockdown and helped to give the right kind of support to our children and young people.

- **Welfare Rights Officers** continued to offer online and telephone advice for families anxious about benefit and Social Security issues. The welfare needs of NHS Highland and Argyll and Bute Council staff were also considered; information about welfare support, money and income was distributed to staff via the Wellbeing Wednesday communications. These steps helped to give information and reassurance in stressful times.

- **Women's Aid and the Housing Department worked closely together** to ensure women and children fleeing domestic violence during lockdown were quickly rehoused and that a shortage of refuge accommodation did not impact on safety or the need to exit dangerous situations.

- **The Family Placement Manager** maintained contact with children and young people in residential placements out with Argyll and Bute and ensured that their needs were met. There was ongoing communication between the Lead for Care Experienced Children and the Named Persons of external education /placement providers. She also contacted all schools where the Lead Professional is from another authority to ensure that there was been continuity of contact and support.

- The Education Lead for Looked After Children offered **financial support for the purchase of devices through the Care Experienced fund** (in line with Scottish Government approval to re-allocate funds to address risks associated with lockdown). **The Digital Inclusion Project** worked across Argyll and Bute to obtain, repair and distribute smart phones, laptops and other devices to those without these resources.

- **A bank of resource materials** were added to the resource hub – attached to Our Children Their Mental Health, related to COVID 19 for young people, parents or professionals.
  https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_resources_updated_april_2020.pdf

- With ferry transportation curtailed innovative solutions were piloted; for example the **use of Drones** to fly tests and drugs to the island of Mull Hospital; this taking only 15 minutes rather than the several hours a ferry might have taken.

Although there are mitigation measures in place, the effects of covid19 mean that long term effects on income and employment will likely be substantial. Those who already had the least resources before the COVID-19 pandemic are at greatest risk of experiencing adverse economic and health consequences now. Key population groups who are likely to need ongoing economic support include those most at-risk and with least resources: low income families with children; primary care givers (chiefly women and lone parents); young people at risk of not entering or sustaining positive destination; disabled and long-term sick. In Argyll and Bute the Department of Work and Pensions said that for 16-24 year olds there was almost 180% increase in claimants over 6 months Feb to Aug averaging 30% increases per month with similar increases in claimants aged 25-59 and slightly lower increases for 60+.

To assist and support children and young people trying to transition to work, training and further education during the covid19 pandemic : *Argyll and Bute Transition Workstream; Post-Covid 19 Recovery Guidance for Transition for all Ages and Stages* was developed as a guide for Schools and partner organisations. This included what supports could be accessed through the Community Learning Services Team, Schools Development Scotland and Argyll College. It also gave guidance on the feelings and health issues that children and young people might be experiencing and how these could be supported. This was in addition to the protocols, assessments and supports available to young people with disability; as set out in*: Argyll and Bute's Children. Post School Transition: Children and young people affected by disability.* Social work and health supported children with a disability by providing: 18 overnight respites at Ardlui; 3 external specialist residential placements and 83 day respite provision.

Argyll and Bute Council, Highland Health Board and their partners continue to support children and families affected and disadvantaged by covid19 and its impact on daily life. It anticipated that covid19 and exit from the EU will combine to produce some major challenges to local services and to the local and national economy.

As the Scottish Government looks towards recovery, it has established a Social Renewal Advisory Board, with specific policy circles established to inform future government work on the basis of learning from the pandemic and ensuring a fairer society. Argyll and Bute

Council are directly represented on the policy circle exploring Access to Food. Argyll and Bute also held a 'Listening Event' following a request from the Board to help understand the lived experience of lockdown. This took place on 9 September with members of the community who experienced particular disadvantage during lockdown and the outcome of this was shared with the Board to help shape policy on social justice and addressing inequality.

In addition The Oxford Economics Vulnerability Index, considers a local authority's economic diversity, business environment and digital connectivity to consider how able, or not, an area is to withstand and respond to the economic shock resulting from COVID-19. A score above 100 on the index means an area is more vulnerable than the Great Britain average. Argyll & Bute scored 150.6 and was the 1st most vulnerable local authority. Digital connectivity contributed most to the locality's vulnerability (a score of 193.8) suggesting poor broadband speeds and low rates of working from home. Economic diversity (a score of 140.9) and Business environment (a score of 131.9) also contributed to the locality's vulnerability suggesting a greater share of self-employment and small firms in the region and a greater reliance on gross value added (GVA) in sectors most exposed to COVID-19 impacts.

Argyll and Bute A coherent labour market response to the emerging unemployment crisis; Making Skills Work for Scotland. 11thSeptember 2020; Skills Development Scotland.

In Argyll and Bute steps are being taken to tackle these challenges, prepare for exit from the EU and learn lessons from covid19. This includes a Recovery Group looking at lessons learned which includes a stream which will be investigating impacts on child poverty and how to address them. Close working will be taking place between a wide range of partners, including: SDS, Employability, DWP, third sector, Colleges and Universities, Benefits, Public Health, Workforce Development, Council HR, Youth Services, local business, under the auspices of the Councils Employability Team. Despite the very concerning financial picture, we are determined to move forward in a socially inclusive manner and try to "Build Back Better".

A. Increasing Income from Employment and Earnings

1. **Employability:**

Delivery of the **Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF)** has commenced within the broader context of the No One Left Behind policy direction Phase 1.

Eligible participants are:

- Lone Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parents with a disability or families who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have a disabled child
- Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have 3 or more children
- Parents from a minority ethnic background who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parents who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty and have a youngest child <1.
- Parents who are aged <25 who are unemployed or experiencing in work poverty
- Parent must have the right to live and work in the UK

The main objectives/expected outcomes are to support the delivery of the Scottish Government's Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) to deliver a flexible and user-based model of employability support for the parental groups identified in Every Child, Every Chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022, through:

Appropriate support focusing on intensive key worker support that provides:

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

Delivering employability support to parents by:

- Identification, (re)engagement and support for parents who require support to access or progress in the labour market; and multi-agency partnership working within the partnership to ensure sufficient and suitable onward progression opportunities are available.
- Deliver intensive in and out of work employability support, including support to upskill, apply for jobs, etc. for low income parents who are not ready for Fair Start Scotland and other local or national programmes.
- Help in meeting the increasing challenge of in-work poverty, targeting in-work support to help parents already in work to upskill, providing access to training and support to progress in employment.
- Person-centred help for parents to address their barriers to work, which includes training, upskilling, as well as support to access health support, money advice, or motivational support through supporting individuals to access these wrap around support services.
- Delivering Employability Key Worker support services throughout a participant's journey. Key Workers will work with participants throughout the process and continue to provide support for up to 26 weeks following the participant's progression into work.
- Ensuring Employability Key Workers have the skills and local awareness to support the implementation of Action Plans, including full awareness of all support provided locally by partner organisations.
- Carrying out an initial assessment of all participants to ascertain specific barriers and needs; providing an Action Plan to participants identified as requiring this intervention.
- Providing aftercare support for up to 52 weeks that enables participants entering employment to sustain and further improve their skills.
- Delivering an employability system that supports more parents, particularly those facing multiple barriers - to move into the right job at the right time.
- Putting in place arrangements that maximise the opportunity for inclusion and investment of partner funds.
- Enhancing links between ELC expansion and local employability services to support new training and employment opportunities- and upskilling and progression of existing staff - enabled by the funded 1,140 ELC provision. To opportunities specifically available within the expanding ELC sector.

It is anticipated a total of 41 parents will be supported (19 unemployed and 22 employed) by 31st March 2021. Five parents are currently receiving support with a further 7 referrals in the pipeline.

Further support available under the No One Left Behind policy direction is the **Argyll and Bute Employer Recruitment and Training Incentive (ABERTI)**. This incentive is aimed at job ready participants aged 16 to 67 years. Employers are able to recruit a maximum of two employees per annum and must be able to evidence employment is in addition to their

existing workforce and will lead to a sustainable job. The funding, a maximum £3,500 per employee, may be used by the employer at their discretion to help towards the costs associated with employing the additional member of staff. However a minimum of £500 must be spent on direct training provision (which may include in-work training) and must be evidenced on the employee's Learning Action Plan and copies of relevant certificate/s provided. To date a total of 15 employees have commenced employment and 21 places remain to be filled with employment commencing no later than 31st March 2021.

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

To be eligible participants must be:

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

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

Dedicated Key Workers provide:

- One-to-one meetings, focusing on and offering a holistic approach to meet individual needs and issues.
- Life coaching, a counselling type approach with guidance and advice.
- Creation of an in-depth action plan to provide pre work support for 12-18 months.
- Participants with the job searching skills required to actively job search, reviewing job applications and CVs.
- Conduct mock interview and interview technique sessions.
- Ensure awareness of other services within the community and signposting as appropriate; Debt Management, Addiction Services, Literacy and Numeracy, Housing Services, Welfare Rights, Citizens Advice, etc.
- Encourage participants to engage in an array of E Learning courses provided by PeoplePlus.
- Provide the opportunity to move into some form of work experience which meets the participant's skills sets and aspirations.
- Offer high quality in-work support for 12 months following the transition to employment.

Future Planned Activity:

Argyll and Bute Council will shortly be submitting an application to the Department of Working Pensions (DWP) to be become a Gateway Organisation for the **Kick Start Scheme** which was recently launched by the UK Government. A gateway organisation is required in Argyll and Bute to act on behalf of small and medium sized businesses that do not have 30 or more bids for job placements, but wish to benefit from the scheme.

The Kickstart Scheme provides funding to employers to create job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit. This scheme provides funding to create new job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long term unemployment. Employers of all sizes can apply for funding which covers:

- 100% of the National Minimum Wage or the National Living Wage (depending on the age of the participant) for 25 hours per week for a total of 6 months
- Associated employer National Insurance contributions

Employers can spread the start date of the job placements up until the end of December 2021.

Business Support:

Economic Growth (including Business Gateway) has been integral to the delivery of hardship funds to businesses, a key source of individual and family livelihoods, as the spread of the pandemic continues.

The **Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund** and the **Coronavirus Bed & Breakfast and Small Serviced Accommodation Provider Hardship Fund** closed to applications on 10th July 2020. On 20th October the **Business Hardship Fund** (supporting businesses affected by temporary restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19) was launched and is being administered by Economic Growth.

The Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator Programme (LGAP), received Scottish Government approval (22nd October 2020) to repurpose and flex the LGAP support to allow the programme to also help businesses build their resilience to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing economic climate, which includes EU Exit.

Economic and Social Recovery Group:

The focus on Economic and Social Recovery is a key element of Argyll and Bute Recovery Strategy and Framework, hosted by Argyll and Bute Council, aligned to the content and future direction set out by the Scottish Government in terms of national recovery.

The Argyll Economic Resilience Forum has been established in Argyll and Bute chaired by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) with a Vice Chair from Argyll and Bute Council. The

principal objective of the Forum is to provide a collective platform for the 'voice' of industry to restart and reshape economic and social recovery across the communities of Argyll and Bute. An Officer Advisory Group has also been established to support the Forum, with a particular focus to facilitate the preparation, delivery and implementation of an Economic and Social Recovery Plan for Argyll and Bute that is fair and inclusive; building in the concept of community wealth building.

2. Employability actions in Schools / achievements. Plans and Covid19.

The No One Left Behind programme is delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's Community Learning Service and Employability Service. The Community Learning team work with learners to develop bespoke personal learning plans based on the learner's strengths, skills and aspirations to support them to access a positive destination. School leavers at risk of not entering a positive destination can also be supported for a period of up to six months. Throughout the CoVid19 lockdown period contact was maintained with No One Left Behind learners. An online programme has been developed and currently we have 20 learners engaged with a further 6 referrals in the pipeline.

Work has been carried out between the Education Management Team, Schools, Employers and Health and Safety to ensure that winter leaver's with employment offers are supported to access Flexible Learning Plans that will enable them to go on work placement. CoVid19 has presented significant challenges, however along with appropriate learning offers from schools, this model ensures that the young people remain engaged and receive practical work experience in their chosen career pathway.

In response to the CoVid19 lockdown and restrictions Community Learning piloted an online version of the GIVE (Get Inspired through Volunteering and Engagement) programme in Helensburgh this summer. 40 young People registered for the programme with an average of 28 participating on each activity. Feedback from young people suggests the online GIVE programme was a great success and very much contributed to their health and well-being during an unprecedented and difficult period. The programme will be offered across the authority for the October holidays.

The Annual Participation Measure (APM) reports on the economic and employment activity of the wider 16-19 year old cohort, including those at school. The measure is used to inform policy, planning and service delivery and to determine the impact of the Opportunities for All commitment. Despite a slight reduction of 0.7% in the 2020 figure, Argyll and Bute records 94.1% of 16 to 19 year olds as being in a positive destination, above the Scottish average of 92.1%

As part of the Scottish Youth Guarantee funding announced recently, discussions are underway with the DYW Regional Board to enhance the DYW provision in every secondary school in Argyll and Bute. Initial consultations have taken place with Head teachers to establish DYW priorities in each school and to begin formulating responses.

ALIenergy deliver educational sessions in local schools and within the wider community to promote STEM education and careers opportunities in Mid Argyll and Kintyre, funded by Scottish Power Renewables, Beinn an Tuirc Community Benefit Fund 'Regional Tranche'. The steering group includes ALIenergy (SPR) and Argyll and Bute Council. This project encourages and facilitates young people to seek careers in STEM subjects and the renewable energy sector, providing events, workshops and careers advice in schools and communities, particularly in the areas of Mid Argyll and the Kintyre Peninsula.

The delivery takes a joined-up approach whereby the following elements combine to provide a rolling programme taking participants on a STEM 'journey' from the end of primary school until the point which consideration of subject choices are starting to be made at secondary school; Introduction to STEM during Primary 7 class, Transition to secondary schools, Family learning events and local careers events. This approach aims to complement the Scotland-wide drive to enhance awareness and uptake of STEM subjects and vocational opportunities. The target area of Mid Argyll and Kintyre is a remote rural area on the West coast of Scotland where there are challenges in access to external educational facilities such as the Glasgow Science Centre.

ALIenergy developed and published individual STEM activity workbooks which enables structured engagement through the student's 2-year STEM journey and promotes participant ownership of their learning experience. The project delivers a varied series of engaging workshops and family fun sessions to raise awareness of STEM and encourage young people to continue their studies in these subject areas, whilst working in partnership with local employers to provide support and information about careers and training opportunities.

In 2019/20 ALIenergy worked with all S1 students in the Mid Argyll and Kintyre area (approximately 132 participants across 8 workshops) and all Primary 7 pupils in the same area (approximately 154 pupils across 10 workshops). ALIenergy's Education Officers delivered 3 Pop-Up STEM sessions during the holiday period in Lochgilphead, Tarbert and Campbeltown as well as holding a stall at the Kintyre Show, Islay Show and Mid Argyll Show. Over 500 children and families engaged on a one to one basis with 1000s visiting the stall and pop-up to pick up leaflets and browse resources.

As STEM Ambassadors, officers are part of a nationwide movement of professionals committed to enhancing skills in these critical subject areas and raising awareness of the vital contribution expertise in them has to offer in building skills capacity for the society of the future. With a total of 19 local hubs, the STEM Ambassador network brings together a huge range of volunteers from a variety of STEM related sectors, professions and academic areas. STEM Ambassadors' contributions of time, energy and expertise can have an enormous impact on events, helping young people, parents, carers, teachers and others to see at first-hand the relevance and importance of these subjects and explore pathways to pursue them.

Due to COVID-19 we are redesigning project delivery to accommodate restrictions so we can safely deliver activities. We are in discussion with funders and schools to design a new delivery programme that will most likely move to virtual and/or outdoor learning.

Funding from RES in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will deliver STEM Family Learning Packs to Primary 6 pupils in PEF funded schools in Cowal, Bute and Helensburgh.

Quotes from children, parent/carers and teachers:

"This is great. So much of this kind of thing gets missed out from the school curriculum. Schools often don't have the hands on resources that kids get so much out of."

"I am a local teacher and will be teaching the weather next term, this has given me lots of ideas"

"I am a science lover – this is like our favourite stall in the whole world"

"Wow there's a lot of colour and fun things to do in here. You will have my daughter in this tent all day"

"Thank you for making science so exciting for them"

"Really important to have events like this, they help to support children in choices which can be challenging and involve conflicting factors." (local Science teacher)

"Thanks! I had a great time. There was lots to do." (primary school pupil who stayed for 2.5 hours!)

"You don't need to go to university to be successful. You should look local first." (local resident on local opportunities info board)

2. Argyll and Bute: - Offering Apprenticeship Opportunities

Since June 2019, the council has employed 6 apprentices bringing the total employed since 2014 to 62. During this time 10 apprentices who started their apprenticeship before June 2019 completed their apprenticeship with 8 out of 10 going onto secure further employment with Argyll and Bute Council. Going forward the council hopes to be able to continue to offer additional apprenticeship opportunities, this has been made more complicated with the current remote working environment we are facing as a result of covid but it is hoped that we will be able to recruit a minimum of 5 apprentices across Argyll and Bute in January 2021. We have a high rate of apprentices going onto secure employment with Argyll and Bute Council on completion with 74% off all apprentices completed securing a job with the council. By linking all our vacancies to workforce planning we are hopeful that this trend can continue.

During the period June 2019-2021 we also expanded our Foundation Apprenticeship Programme to offer places to a number of different schools across Argyll and Bute. In 2018, we had 5 Foundation Apprentices in Social Services Children and Young People all based in Rothesay Academy. Last year we started 41 young people on the course from Lochgilphead, Campbeltown, Oban, Dunoon, Helensburgh and Rothesay. The foundation apprenticeship offers the opportunity for a school pupil to gain work experience and a

vocational qualification whilst in school. They gain a qualification which is equivalent to a higher and at the same time get to experience a work placement which provides them with key experience, skills and knowledge. This is not only a brilliant addition to a school leavers CV but it allows Argyll and Bute Council to grow a quality Early Years workforce for the future.

Between June 2019 and June 2020, the council employed 9 Graduate Trainees posts. 2 of these posts were Graduate Apprenticeships where post holders are provided the opportunity to gain a degree level qualification through work based learning and attendance at university. They work whilst they learning meaning they can put their skills into practice straight away. The remaining 7 are graduate posts where post holders have a degree level qualification and are gaining the skills and knowledge they need to become a qualified professional.

Argyll and Bute Council works closely with schools to facilitate work placements for young people where possible and has established links with DYW Argyll to offer opportunities for young people in the local area where it is possible to do so.

4. Council actions on Pay and Conditions

The council's Business Continuity Committee agreed changes to the council's pay and grading structure which will increase pay for lower grades, introduce new higher grades, and better match allowances to modern-day working.

- Salaries in the lowest grades will be increased to include the SLG Living Wage. All councils must introduce this Living Wage into their salary structures by April 2021. Argyll and Bute Council has been a living wage employer since 2013 and pays a supplement to more than 580 employees whose hourly rate falls below the SLG Living Wage.

- This would need an increase in a number of supervisory roles, to reflect the difference in demands between grades. Part of this includes creating two new grades at the higher end of the scale.

Changes will also bring changes to some terms and conditions:

- additional special leave entitlement;

- an end to outdated allowances to address inequalities;

- new allowances to better support a modern workforce;

- updating the flexible working system;

- refreshing the employee benefits package.

In addition, the Council is an equal opportunities employer and this is reflected in their provision of maternity, paternity and adopters leave. Ensuring equal access to special leave etc. is considered key to respecting the rights of children born to all families and ensuring their wellbeing.

In the case of an adopted child, ordinary paternity leave is available to an employee who is married to, or the civil partner of the child's adopter, or the cohabiting partner of the child's adopter (including same sex partners). Ordinary paternity leave is available to adoptive parents where a child is matched or newly placed with them for adoption, including where the child is adopted from overseas. Either the adoptive father or the adoptive mother may take ordinary paternity leave where the other adoptive parent has elected to take adoption leave.

Argyll and Bute Council Paternity Leave and Maternity and Adoption Support Leave procedures for Local Government Employees, Teachers and Associated professionals

Also the Council has a policy of considering requests for flexible working in order to help families to ensure a health work life balance.

5. **Economic Development and Strategic Transportation (2019- 2022)**

The principal purpose of the Service is to:

To work in partnership to attract external investment that delivers SME business support, sectoral growth, key physical and digital infrastructure enhancements to grow our economy, to improve local skills, create and retain high quality jobs and build sustainable communities that will attract residents, businesses and visitors.

Key Actions Relating to Addressing Child Poverty:

- Council subsidise scholar flights from Colonsay and Coll to Oban free of charge to enable students to access education and travel home at weekends.
- We are working with DCMS/BDUK with a view to securing grant funding to install high speed, full fibre broadband connections to 12 of our most remote schools. This includes a number of our island communities;
- Inclusive growth / community wealth building will be an integral part of our Rural Growth Deal proposals – targeting poverty, increasing economic activity including targeting youth unemployment, STEM skills, addressing fuel poverty etc. (www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/RGD).

6. Skills Development Scotland / Argyll and Bute

- **School Service** – Service focused on S3– S6 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. Additional inputs as required focused on particularly vulnerable groups e.g. learning support units in school.

  Our targeted school services S3 - S6 pupils continued throughout April 2019 - March 2020, in discussion with school senior leadership teams and guidance staff. This ensured that our actions as part of our partnership agreements with schools aligned with school improvement plans and contributed to addressing the attainment gap. Since 20 March 2020, when schools closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, our careers service has moved from face-to-face service delivery to online and telephone. This meant target support for school pupils Senior Phase was sustained, alongside support from local authority partners.

- **Post School Service Next Steps** - Service to support young people aged 16 – 18 (extended to 26 for care experienced young people) who are unemployed, helping them to build up their career management skills and move on to and sustain a range of options as appropriate: Activity Agreements, Employability Fund and other training programmes, education and employment.

  The service continued throughout 2019 - 2020 supporting young people to develop their career management skills and progress through the employability pipeline. Following closure of our centres on 19 March 2020 our advisers moved to on-line and telephone delivery and continued to provide targeted and universal support for adult customers, including Next Steps support.

- **Post school service; adults -** Working in partnership with a range of partners to support local job clubs helping unemployed adults to develop their career management and employability skills and move into employment.

  The service continued throughout 2019 - 2020 with advisers supporting customers impacted by a number of significant redundancy situations in Argyll and Bute as part of Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE), working alongside local and national PACE partners. Following closure of our centres on 19 March 2020 our advisers moved to on-line and telephone delivery and continued to provide targeted and universal support for adult customers, including delivering PACE redundancy support for employers, employees and apprentices.

- 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.

7. Argyll College and University of the Highlands and Islands; Supporting Care Experienced Young People:

Where possible work experience and work placements are built into courses to enhance students' skills and employability. The college delivers a variety of SVQs and Modern Apprenticeships to further promote work based learning.

The College and UHI welcomes applications from students who may not have the conventional course entry requirements and can offer contextualised interviews to establish a relevant course route and level for a potential student. As part of the COVID-19 strategy the Admissions Department have developed processes to enable students to be interviewed by a variety of online technologies such as Skype for Business.

Argyll College and UHI provide a wide range of support services and have developed ways to deliver this support remotely during the COVID-19 situation. As teaching moved to being fully online and using a variety of technologies students who did not have suitable IT equipment were able to have college laptops on loan. Where students could not afford internet bursary systems have been used to help support students to buy dongles or to source some internet. Support Assistants have continued to provide one to one learning support via phone and WebEx technologies. The College has a Student Counsellor and Wellbeing Officer who has trained in online counselling, and college staff remain in frequent contact with students, referring them to the college counsellor for mental health support if necessary.

The College and UHI recognise the barriers that Care Experienced young people can have to further and higher education. All Care Experienced students can receive support to apply for enhanced bursary, general wellbeing support and additional learning support if required. (Scottish Government, 2020)

This kind of support is important to care experienced young people because they continue to achieve poorly, compared to their peers. In 2017/18 62% of all school leavers had 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 6 or better, whereas only 12% of school leavers who were in care for the full year and 11% who were in care for part of the year had qualifications at this level (Scottish Government, 2019). Some progress is being made and across all levels of study at university and college, the number of Care Experienced entrants increased from 2,070 in 2016-17 to 2,545 in 2017-18 (SFC, 2019). However at all levels, Care Experienced students have lower rates of completing courses compared to all students at university and college. Between Care Experienced students and non-Care Experienced students, there is a difference of 5.3% for retention at university. Argyll and Bute Council is continuing to deliver a range of services aimed at improving the educational attainment and life chances of care experienced children and young people.

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/news/2020/jun/supporting-care-experienced-children-and-young-people

8. Procurement

Argyll and Bute Council's Procurement Annual Procurement Report 2019 / 2020 notes the following processes and policies which address equality and the three drivers of poverty:

a) Comply with the statutory requirements on the payment of a living wage to persons involved in producing, providing or constructing the subject matter of regulated procurements; through contributing towards improving the social wellbeing element - in particular, reducing inequality in Argyll and Bute - of our sustainable procurement duty by promoting the Living Wage and fair work practices in regulated procurements; while ensuring a proportionate approach which provides an appropriate balance between quality and cost.

Progress: Of the 31 regulated procurements carried out in 2019/20, which had a CSS, 23 (74.2%) included consideration of Fair Work Practices. The remaining procurement exercise had started prior to the inclusion of this requirement within the template. A contract condition relating to Fair Work Practices was included within 15 (33.3%) regulated procurements carried out in 2019/20; these are the only ones it was considered to be relevant to.

b) Complying with the Council's Sustainable Procurement Policy (Appendix 2) in relation to the use of community benefit requirements.

Progress: Of the 45 regulated procurements carried out in 2019/20, which were not within an external framework, 21 (46.7%) included Community Benefits Clauses. Of

the remaining 10 procurements, 6 (13.3%) were below the internal £100k threshold for the mandatory inclusion of a CBC within Supplies and Services contracts; and the final 4 (8.9%) were not considered appropriate for the inclusion of a CBC due to the scope of the contracts.

c) Complying with the statutory requirements on how we intend our approach to regulated procurements involving the provision of food to: (i) improve the health, wellbeing and education of communities in the authority's area, and (ii) promote the highest standards of animal welfare, by considering relevant national guidance.

d) Ensuring that the Council's regulated procurements will be carried out in compliance with the sustainable procurement duty, through embedding sustainable procurement as business as usual – ensuring that sustainability issues are considered at all stages of individual procurement exercises; considering how individual procurement exercises can assist the Council to improve the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of Argyll and Bute; facilitating the involvement of small and medium enterprises, third sector bodies, minority groups and supported business in the procurement process; and by promoting innovation at the initial stage of regulated procurements.

   Progress: Of the 31 regulated procurements in 2019/20, which had CSSs, 23 (74.2%) considered Sustainability issues. The remaining 8 (25.8%) were not considered to be appropriate.

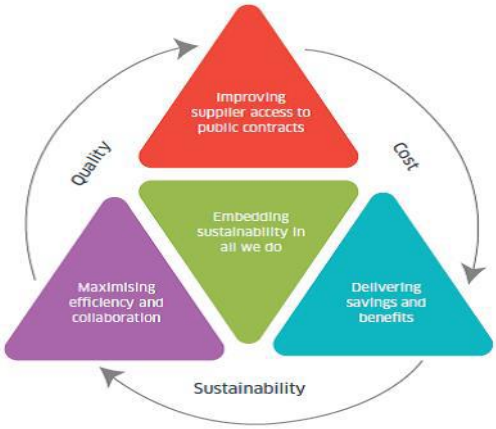
e) Council procurement scheme to benefit community projects; Published Date: 28 Aug 2020

   A new procurement initiative from Argyll and Bute Council is set to benefit communities looking for help with projects in their local area. The new process enables contractors and suppliers appointed by the council to choose from a list of proposed community benefits, that community groups have identified, as part of the tender. The Community Benefit Scheme can include a range of benefits including anything from additional volunteering hours to help create raised beds, supporting fundraising towards a new minibus, providing building or decorating materials and help with planting or weeding. Communities are being urged to complete an online application form detailing the support that they would like to be considered.

How does it work?

- Community groups will be asked to apply online for requests for help with projects in their local area
- Once approved, requests will be added to a wish list
- As part of the tender award any contract worth over £200,000 **must** include a community benefit
- If the tender award is under £200,000, contractors and suppliers can still choose from the wish list

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2019-20_annual_procurement_report_v.01.pdf
https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/procurement_strategy_and_spp_2020-21_-_v0.3_0.pdf



B. Increasing Income through Benefits

1. Scottish Welfare Fund 2019/2020

The expenditure in Scottish Welfare fund for 2019/2020 was £447,287. Of this expenditure £375,414 was spent on Community Care Grants which is the provision of funds to purchased goods and furniture items for qualifying persons moving into or out of care. £71,872 was spent on Crisis Grants used to support low income households affected by emergency or disaster situations where they typically need support with daily living expenses or fuel.

This represents an increase of £4,000 on the previous year, roughly a 1% increase in spend.

2. Discretionary Housing Payments 2019/2020

In 2019/2020 the Council spent £662,151 supporting individuals who were struggling to meet their rent costs by supporting them with a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). This represents an over spend of £19,981 on the annual budget of £642,170. The over spend was in relation to costs associated with mitigating the removal of the spare room subsidy and therefore was covered by tranche 2 funding received from the Scottish Government in August 2020.

3. Client Gain 2019/2020

In 2019/2020 welfare rights teams across Argyll and Bute managed to increase the level of benefits received by citizens to a total of £6,614,745 during the year. This is a 7% increase on the previous year and represents considerable benefit to families living with financial difficulties. The break down across the respective organisations is detailed below;

Client Gain Figures Argyll and Bute 2019/2020

ORGANISATION	CLIENT GAIN 2019/2020 (£)	CLIENT GAIN 2018/2019 (£)
Argyll and Bute Council	2,988,393	£3,666,622
Argyll Community Housing Association Working with Bute Advice	2,628,739	2,844,000
Money Skills Argyll *	279,407	460,000
Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau	718,206	681,000
	6,614,745	**6,185,000**

*Estimated

4. Automation of School Clothing Grant Payments

In 2019/2020 the council was able to automate the payment of School Clothing Grants for the first time by matching data held in the Education management system to that held in Benefits relating to Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants. An extra £20,900 was paid to customers via paypoint voucher because of this extra automation in October 2019. This brought the spend for the 2019/2020 year on School Clothing Grants to £167,200, an

increase of 15% or £21,850 from 2018/2019 expenditure levels. This work is important in ensuring that families who might otherwise not have claimed, either from confusion over entitlement or fear of stigma, will get this important benefit.

5. Social Security Scotland; Activity in Argyll and Bute:

The Social Security Scotland Local Delivery Team for Argyll and Bute have been engaging with the Local Authority, housing associations, third sector organisations, Health and Social Care partners and charities to raise awareness of the Agency, and the benefits we are delivering.

We have visited Funeral Directors, schools and nurseries and attended local meetings and events, to engage with the local community and raise awareness of our role.

Our local partners have been helping us in raising awareness, and have found our stakeholder resources toolkit a great support when updating their newsletters, Twitter, Facebook and Social Media sites.

A summary of the number of benefit applications and payments made by Local Authority area can be found on the Scottish Government website:

- Carers Allowance Supplement
- Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods
- Funeral Support Payment
- Young Carers Grant

C. Cost of Living:

1. Cost of the School Day / Holiday Hunger etc.

- Two Head Teachers conferences in session 2019-20 included sessions on Cost of the School Day included as part of Pupil Equity Funding Sessions.
- Three twilight training sessions for school staff on Pupil Equity Funding took place virtually in the 2019-20 session.
- Northern Alliance leads for closing the poverty related attainment gap presented a virtual twilight in the 2019-20 session.
- Schools using PEF funding to address Cost of the School Day issues such as breakfast clubs and wider achievement opportunities (swimming, horse riding, outdoor education).
- Free school meal uptake in Argyll and Bute is higher than average uptake across Scotland, with uptake in P1 – 3 at around 82%.

2. Period Poverty:

Prior to the covid19 pandemic period products were freely available in schools for pupils who needed them, there was a Lead Officer on this on behalf of Education, but implementation and budget was managed by each head teacher locally. Also prior to covid19, the Council's Commercial Manager was rolling out the community aspect of this, including provision to young people (and all others) out with schools. The aim was to help improve the reach of reusable products and, as part of that, immediately prior to the pandemic, arrangements had been made for supplies to go to Kintyre Youth Café and Girl Guiding in Helensburgh who were both keen to trial reusable period products for their young people (along with regular supplies). Monies had been earmarked to improve supplies of reusable products.

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

Statutory changes are coming into effect for provision and we will continue to keep abreast of these. This approach will continue for the foreseeable future, but products remain available in schools. Provision of period products ensure that those girls unable to afford such products are not disadvantaged and do not lose any School or social time as a result.

3. Housing

The Housing Sector has a crucial role to play in addressing child poverty and promoting a more inclusive and fairer Scotland for all. Affordable, good quality accommodation and appropriate support services are critical factors in helping families and young people to be resilient and independent. Argyll & Bute Council and our housing partners are committed to monitoring and improving circumstances for all children living in the area; and Housing Services will continue to ensure that appropriate linkages are established between the Local Housing Strategy and the Child Poverty Action Plan.

This will involve inter alia:

- monitoring both social and private rents across the authority area;
- facilitating an appropriate mix of property types and sizes within the new build SHIP programme;
- reducing incidence of homeless households which include children;
- promoting support for families with vulnerable children; and
- minimising occupancy in temporary accommodation.

Significant challenges remain to be addressed:-

- 47% of families (households with children under 16) occupy dwellings which fail the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) compared to only 37% in Scotland as a whole. (SHCS, LA Results, 2016-18, published 2020).
- Over a third (36%) of households in need currently on the HOMEArgyll waiting list includes children under 16.
- Over 22% of homeless households in 2019/20 included children (21 couples with children and 76 single parent families).

Argyll and Bute Council no longer has housing stock (Council Houses) available for rent. We work with the local Housing Associations to build new homes. In 2019/20 75 new affordable homes were provided and there are plans for 137 new build homes in 2020/21.

ACHA's new build development at Glenshellach, Oban includes: 2x 1 bed flats designed as fully wheelchair accessible homes; 1x 2 bed flat with wet-floor shower and soundproofing; and 1x 3 bed property with minor adaptations designed to suit a child with autism.

Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme – Argyll and Bute Council operates this scheme which can help people to access rented accommodation in the private sector. Instead of a new prospective tenant having to find the deposit that is often required, the council will guarantee that the deposit will be paid if any damage is done to the property while the tenant is living there. The tenant will agree to reimburse the Council for the cost of any loss or damage to the property caused by an act/s of neglect or negligence by themselves or their visitors. In 2019/20 six households were helped with this scheme.

Gypsy / Travellers

The Council retains a statutory duty to assess the accommodation and support needs of Gypsy/Travellers, and ensure that appropriate provision is available. The two official sites owned and managed by ACHA, at Bayview (formerly Ledaig) near Oban and Duncholgan near Lochgilphead, continue to provide 22 pitches in total to accommodate this client group with an occupancy rate of 41% in 2020. At the end of 2019/20 there were a total of 9 households and 18 individuals resident onsite.

Official TP Site and Pitches	**31st March 2020**	
	Duncholgan	**Ledaig**
Total pitches:	**14**	**8**
pitches occupied:	**6**	**3**
pitches vacant and available:	**0**	**0**
pitches vacant and not available:	**8**	**5**
Tenants – Nos of Households/Families	**6**	**3**
- Total persons	**13**	**5**

Source: Twice Yearly Gypsy/Traveller Site Count, March 2020

In recent years, the average weekly pitch rent has been consistently well below the Scottish average, and is currently £52.17; while customer satisfaction within this client group has been significantly higher than the national average, and currently stands at 100% for the second year in a row (ACHA Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey 2019).

The Council continues to support the upkeep of the official sites with grant award to ACHA from the Strategic Housing Fund, which amounted to:

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19*	2019/20	4 year Total
Grant	£39,660	£41,228	£31,001	£28,939	£140,828

* Since 2018/19 Council Grant has been reduced to reflect the reduction in provision, following the closure of Torlochan site in Cowal.

ACHA's updated Gypsy/Traveller Strategy for 2019-2022 continues to focus on delivering the site standards set out in Scottish Government guidance re: Essential Fabric Standards; Energy Efficiency; Facilities and Amenities; Safety and Security; Maintenance and Repairs; Fair Treatment; Consultation; and Occupancy Agreements.

In March 2020 the Scottish Government announced the allocation of a one-off short-term funding initiative in support of the national Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan which was launched in 2019. ACHA have been awarded **£108,726**, to be administered by the council, for improvements to the local Gypsy/Traveller sites in 2020/21. A range of positive options are being explored jointly with local site tenants and the ultimate aim is to deliver immediate benefits and improve the quality of life for these residents.

4. Community Food Forum

On the 6th of February 2020 the Argyll and Bute Community Food Forum was launched. This Council supported initiative was be a network through which existing independent food-banks, food waste and community food initiatives can share experience, advice and ideas.

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

This was a timely initiative as Covid19 officially arrived in March. Throughout the pandemic the resilience shown by the Food Forum and its members was remarkable, as were community efforts to support their work. At a meeting in September some of those efforts were discussed;

- Hope Kitchen in Oban stated that numbers rose from 20 allocations per week to 233 per week, it averaged out to around 180 and has settled now at 120 allocations each week.

- Helensburgh and Lomond Foodbank discussed the level of effort made in making the foodbank accommodation covid safe. 40 parcels each week are being given out. Support through food provision for children over the holidays has had a positive impact on the numbers. Numbers however are up 25% on last year.

- Bute Oasis provided 3235 allocations of food from the start of shut down. Initially the figures were around 400 per week, then when the Council allocation began and they were able to transfer 170 to the Council list. Bute Oasis was still delivering to those shielding to the end of August. As the main source of funding was through sales in the shop, closing the shop had a huge impact on resourcing the foodbank. Through local fundraising Bute Oasis has maintained their services.

5. Fuel Poverty – Argyll, Lomond and the Islands Energy Agency (ALIenergy):

New Fuel Poverty Definition update: The new definition of Fuel Poverty is comprised of two main elements: the ability to maintain an acceptable standard of living as determined by the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) and the ability to maintain an appropriate heating regime. A household is now considered to be Fuel Poor if it spends more than 10% of its adjusted income on energy costs and still fails both of these criteria.

ALIenergy along with other organisations across Scotland called for a MIS uplift to reflect the greater costs incurred by those living in remote, rural and island areas, and supported the inclusion of enhanced heating regimes to reflect the increased energy usage required to achieve thermal comfort for households with certain characteristics and/or vulnerabilities. Both of these elements were adopted through subordinate legislation.

Scottish Government has varying levels of control over the different drivers of Fuel Poverty, but the Act legislates that progress must be reported against all four of the recognised drivers: energy efficiency, household income, fuel prices, and how energy is consumed in the home. Earlier this year, Kevin Stewart MSP, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, confirmed that the publication of the Scottish Government's Final Fuel

Poverty Strategy had been delayed in order to focus on the immediate support required by FP households impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

ALIenergy have secured funding to continue our work fighting fuel poverty. Our Affordable Warmth Advisors help people reduce their cost of living by helping households reduce their energy costs through a range of measures including tariff switching and heating replacements. The Affordable Warmth Advisors help households' identity benefits they may be entitled to, as well as other financial help, such as the Warm Home Discount (a £140 credit to electricity bills).

However, the Mind the Fuel Poverty Gap-Warm Home Discount in the Scottish context report, published by CAS in 2020, estimated 229,938 households received WHD in Scotland in 2018. This represents 9.3% of Scottish households. 25% of Scottish households are defined as fuel poor, therefore, a majority of households in fuel poverty did not receive WHD. The report also stated "In the 2018 dataset, 77% of the Fuel Poverty gap values were higher than £250 – the Scottish Government's target for 2040". ALIenergy are working to reduce this gap by helping people reduce their energy costs and increase their income.

Fuel poverty in Argyll is at one of the highest levels in Europe, due to poor housing, high energy prices/lack of mains gas, low wages, vulnerable demographics, bad weather and exposure. Fuel poverty affects 1 in 3 households in Argyll.

Recent data has revealed a further 5% rise in electrically heated households in fuel poverty across Scotland as a whole. Due to the time-consuming practical difficulties of working across Argyll and Bute, home visits can be costly. Yet ALIenergy's extensive experience has proven that for many vulnerable customers, home energy visits are crucial and far more effective than telephone advice. This is supported by independent research, e.g. Baker (2019) 'Never try and face the journey alone: Exploring face-to-face advocacy needs of fuel poor'.

For 2020/21, funding received from Energy Redress will deliver energy advice sessions and energy efficiency toolkits to households across Argyll and Bute, particularly homes off the gas grid. Electrically heated households on the common THTC and E10 restricted meters pay most and are likely to be under heating their homes as a result. The THTC tariff unit cost is 4.2x higher than mains gas with no simple options for switching. A switch to E7 from THTC could result in 18% saving.

Funding received from the Robertson Trust will continue our work targeting households using foodbanks and facing the eat or heat dilemma. Funding from RES will provide 100 Winter Warmth toolkits.

"My flat is really cold in the winter but these items helped keep the warm in"

"Thanks for the pack– I wouldn't have been able to afford these items as I'm on benefits"

"I've used all the items in the pack– hot water bottle is my favourite"

ALIenergy believes its crucial people receiving any kind of anti-poverty support are signposted for further support including debt, energy and wellbeing.

COVID-19: At the beginning of COVID-19 outbreak and introduction of lockdown, the ALIenergy Board placed the organisation on furlough from 1st April. It soon transpired lockdown and restrictions would remain in place for some time, so the team returned to work on 1st June. Since then, the team have adapted to working from home and advisors are delivering our energy advice service over telephone and email until it is safe to resume house visits. Our in-depth telephone advice is far more time consuming that first envisioned.

A lot of information can be gathered during a house visit by looking at the property and the person's living conditions. Initial advice sessions are taking longer because the advisor must ask the client every single question as they do not have eyes on the building or circumstances. Advisors are using EPC data, where possible, to get the property's technical details as householders can often misinform advisors of building details. Many of

our clients need handholding through activities and often need pre and post phone calls for something they must do, such as taking meter readings or looking at tariff comparisons. A concern of ours is householders may not admit or even know of other issues in the home when having a telephone conversation. Things like dampness, condensation, draughts and living in cold conditions might not be something all clients tell you over the phone but are instantly recognised by advisors during a house visit.

A report published in September 2020 by Scottish Government, Experimental analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on Fuel Poverty Rates.

https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2020/08/scottish-house-condition-survey-additional-analysis/documents/experimental-analysis-of-the-impact-of-covid19-on-fuel-poverty-rates-report/experimental-analysis-of-the-impact-of-covid19-on-fuel-poverty-rates-report/govscot%3Adocument/Experimental%2Banalysis%2Bof%2Bthe%2Bimpact%2Bof%2BCOVID-19%2Bon%2BFuel%2BPoverty%2BRates%2BReport.pdf

D. Helping Families in Other Ways:

1. Argyll and Bute's LGBTQ+ network

Argyll and Bute's LGBTQ+ network was set up in 2019, holding its first meeting on 19th March, 2019. From the outset, the group comprised representatives from education services and Community Learning and Development, Skills Development Scotland, NHS Highland, Argyll College/UHI, representatives from Mid Argyll Youth Parliament, Waverley Care and Third Sector agencies such as Mid Argyll Youth Development Services (MAYDS) and The Youth Café, Campbeltown. It was considered vital that children and young people be central to the group.

LGBTQ+ youth groups were consulted on what they would look for in the network

Their views included:

- A safe space to interact with other young people;
- Resources to support them;
- Opportunities to take part in equalities activism; and
- Community links with other local authorities.

(Hermitage Academy Sage group)

Those children who were consulted had also talked about the challenges that they had experienced in rural communities and the risk of mental health issues and discrimination were highlighted. It was agreed that as well as considering training opportunities, the group should support schools through educational resources to help embed LGBTQ+-

inclusive policy and curriculum and to this end a guideline highlighting key policies and resources on LGBTQ+ inclusive education was issued to schools. Resources are also updated on Argyll and Bute's SALi and information on updates are publicised to schools on a regular basis.

Events and Training:

- The Oban Pride that took place on Saturday, 18th May, 2019, was significant in that it was the first opportunity that an organised pride event for school-aged young people had taken place.

- In honour of Pride Month on Friday, 21st June, 2019, Tarbert Academy held a Pride Event which was organised by S3 pupils and was well supported by partner agencies and by the local community in Tarbert.

- On 12th September, 2019 the LGBTQ+ Network organised a Getting it Right For LGBTQ+ children and young people in Argyll and Bute Conference. The Conference was well attended by primary and secondary school staff, health and social care, Skills Development Scotland, Police Scotland and Third Sector.

- On Purple Friday, 28th February, 2020 the Network organised a learning event for pupils in S1 to S3. The event took place in Mid-Argyll Community Centre and in the MAYDS centre. The aim of the day was to provide a fantastic opportunity for schools and partners to celebrate diversity in our schools and communities; promote equality and positive relationships; and to help LGBTQ+ children, young people, their families and allies to feel that they are supported and included.

- Stonewall Scotland delivered a workshop on LGBTQ+ awareness to a multi-agency audience of Argyll and Bute professionals on Monday, 24th August 2020 via Skype. The training was very well attended and raised awareness of current research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ children and young people and key terminology.

Next Steps:

- In January, 2020 it was confirmed that Argyll and Bute were awarded funding for our Rainbow Project, which aims to create an outreach programme to support children and young people, school staff and parents to increase LGBTQ+ inclusion. This will build on some of the work being carried out by Claire Brown and Phill Dexter on Police Scotland Choices for Life programme and will form a key part of our work next session. Phill Dexter, our Outreach Worker, will be liaising with schools throughout the year.

- A key aspect of our 2020-21 strategy is to take our training and awareness to the heart of Argyll and Bute Council.
- Unfortunately, due to the Covid19 crisis, the Purple Pride Ball for young people aged 14-18 planned for June, 2020 could not take place. However we hope that we will be able to return to our plans for this sometime next year.

- We also intend to set up our Rainbow Project twitter and facebook page so that our visibility, and critically that of LGBTQ+ children and young people, is enhanced throughout Argyll and Bute.

The Consultation carried out highlighted the social isolation, mental health issues and low self-esteem that can become an issue for children and young people and the additional problems that some might face living in remote and rural communities. All of these factors can contribute to failing to reach full potential and an increasing risk of future lived experience of poverty. The activities done here, in partnership with LGBT+ children and young people have had a positive impact and helped to empower many.

2. **Argyll and Bute Council has a Parent Support and Advice web page** that parents and carers can access for advice including: money advice, child care entitlement, parenting and family activities and child minding. https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/early-years Parents can also contact for help and advice via this web page. Such “one stop shop” pages are invaluable when parents are unsure of where to turn for answers and support.

3. Advice Pathways:

Before Covid-19 Argyll and Bute were looking at the Antenatal contact being the key point of contact for Health Visitor's to have the conversation about 'money worries'. A referral pathway into money advice services, focusing on Bute initially, was planned. Due to the strong links that were made with Bute Advice Services the Health Visiting team in Bute and Dunoon were able to refer families for money advice more easily. Post covid19, this development will be taken further and work will take place via the national Financial Inclusion Programme. It is planned that in the coming year evidence will be gathered to test and develop a Financial Inclusion Pathway between Health Visitors and Advice Services.

4. Care Experienced Children and Young People:

A Life Changes Trust Co-ordinator has been appointed and a Care Experienced Youth Work apprentice employed to run forums for care experienced children and young people and set up a Champions Board in order to engage them in shaping services for them. Participation groups have been set up in Helensburgh and Dunoon and the HELP Project that works with young people is instrumental in encouraging care experienced young people to attend.

Grants of up to £500 can be offered to young people for things that would make a difference to their lives and prospects.

Strong links are maintained between the Throughcare/Aftercare team and young people; workers attend some Participation Groups. Also links with the Fire Service in Helensburgh and Dunoon have been developed via Participation Groups and there is the possibility of Fire Reach Training and Fire Cadets for young people in the future. This would increase their employability prospects but is currently on hold due to covid19 restrictions.

5. To ensure that, in Early Learning and Childcare, our ability to offer 1140 hours per year of high-quality pre-school education to every child remains on-track and was not affected by covid19. This is important, particularly in terms of helping single parent families out of poverty. In June 2020, there were 1,530 children accessing 2,039 ELC spaces across a broad range of Early Learning and Childcare establishments with approximately 160 children sharing their Early Learning and Childcare hours across more than one establishment. Further to the Scottish Government's announcement on 30th July 2020 regarding the reopening of Early Learning and Childcare settings, we will continue to deliver the 1140 hours model with all settings opening from 11th August 2020.

6. Birth in Argyll and Bute Facebook Page:

- To improve access to services
- To share and inform women and families of policies, service changes and useful third sector support
- Share important and consistent information during Covid Pandemic
- Share " good news" stories
- Reduce isolation

7. Maternity Survey:

- To understand the experiences and knowledge of maternity services in Argyll and Bute
- Monitor progress against previous 2 surveys (carried out every 2 years electronically). Action plan developed once analysed to inform future plans for services
- Adapted from the national survey with questions relating to rurality And survey developed with service user input
- Also facilitates women becoming involved in maternity voices group

8. Argyll and Bute Living Well Networks:

The Living Well networks were previously the Health & Wellbeing networks and are a network of organisations and individuals in each locality that are interested in improving health and wellbeing. They provide an opportunity for people to come together to find out what issues matter to local communities; to plan activities and events together; and to distribute grant funding to local projects. Last year small grants were distributed to organisations under the priorities of improving physical activity and self-management. This year Living Well Network Youth Grants were available in the majority of the network areas. Youth organisations were eligible to apply for a small amount of funding to support youth activities, such as physical activity, drama, art and wellbeing. These networks encourage inclusion and mitigate against social isolation.

More information about the networks can be found within the Health & Wellbeing Annual report http://healthyargyllandbute.co.uk/public-health-team-annual-report-2019-2020/

or on the Healthy Argyll and Bute webpage http://healthyargyllandbute.co.uk/.

E. Partnership Working:

1. Argyll and Bute continues to be one of three areas in Scotland leading the way in developing a trauma informed workforce. As part of this we have developed and collated a range of easy to use on line learning materials for everyone in the children's services workforce to help support the different groups of staff who come into contact with children and families as part of their job.

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/trauma-informed-practice-training

- Trauma informed practice information
- Practice level 1 - trauma informed workforce training modules
- Practice level 2 – trauma skilled workforce training modules
- Staff well-being training modules
- Covid – 19 related training modules
- Trauma informed leaders videos

This training quickly went online because of the covid19 outbreak and has be used to train and support workers who work with children and their families who have experienced traumatic experiences during lockdown; domestic abuse, neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, feelings of fear, anxiety, worry and a sense of lack of control and powerlessness. Take up has been encouraging with there being 5000 hits in the first month; Education has made the training mandatory. Training will continue to be developed and eventually become face to face again.

2. Advice Services:

In Argyll and Bute we very much appreciate how important the right advice, made readily available, is to people experiencing poverty and a host of related issues. We work in partnership in order to reach as many people as possible and meet their needs; we also link people to national sources of assistance through Council and Partner web sites, media posts and one to one / online advice meetings.

Council Advice Web Page

- Argyll and Bute Council provides free impartial, confidential advice on welfare rights, complex debt to particularly vulnerable clients, and homelessness;
- Independent advice agencies, including **Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau** and **Bute Advice Centre**;
- **Argyll and Bute Advice Network** (ABAN) is a directory of services, providing information and advice on a range of issues including benefits, housing, carers support, youth services and advice for older people;
- National helplines, including **Citizens Advice Scotland**; **Money Advice Scotland** and the **National Debtline** who provide on-line advice.
- Find a **food bank** in Argyll and Bute.
- Find out how we are working together to **tackle poverty** in Argyll and Bute.

This Council page has advice links to:

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

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

3. Connecting Scotland

Phase 1 of Connecting Scotland is a Scottish Government project that aims to address digital exclusion by providing devices and internet connectivity.

There's a strict criteria and the individual has to meet all three measures –

- In the extremely high vulnerability group ('shielding') or the higher risk of severe illness group
- No device/connectivity
- Low income

A successful bid was submitted to Connecting Scotland by the partners involved in the Digital Connections partnership and based on data and information collated by the Shielding Group.

Initially 84 devices were allocated (52 chrome books and 32 Ipads).

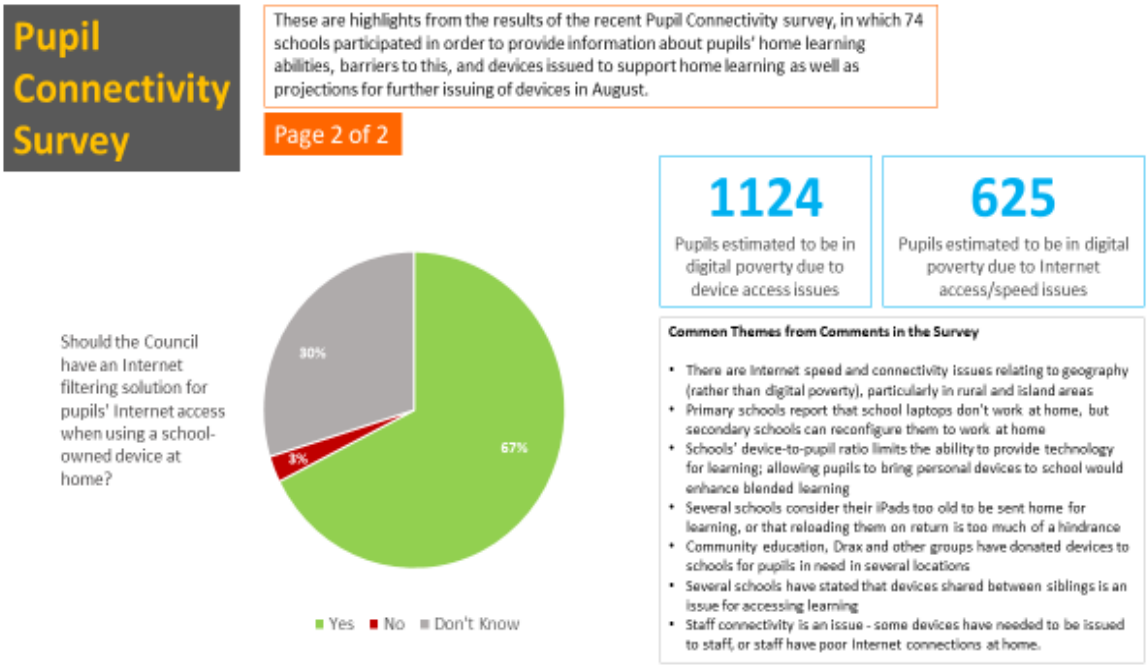
Argyll and Bute Council has contributed 19 IPads and we've recently been informed that a further 50 Ipads will be supplied via Connecting Scotland meaning a total of 153 devices and internet connections will be provided to vulnerable people across Argyll and Bute.

Community Learning team members have been participating on Digital Champion training and will be offering support to set up and use the equipment. Volunteers are also being recruited and supported to participate on the training.

The first of the devices have arrived in Argyll and distribution will begin in the next week.

Phase 2 of Connecting Scotland has been announced and will focus on the target groups of -

- Digitally excluded low income families with children (particularly any gaps not covered by the education programme)
- Young care leavers



4. Digital Connections Project:

Background

Since the onset of Coronavirus it's been obvious that digital solutions were going to be at the forefront of responding to and beating the pandemic. Information, advice, entertainment, meetings and learning have all become increasingly dependent on digital platforms. It very quickly became apparent that many individuals and families did not have the devices to access these services effectively and in some cases at all. Home schooling placed an increased demand on families and even where families had a device, if mum/dad and two or three children were working from home it was difficult to meet all their need. There has been reports of two or three children of the same family attempting to access blended learning opportunities on a parent's mobile phone.

A partnership project in Campbeltown, involving InspirAlba, Kintyre Youth Café and South Kintyre Community Resilience Group recognised the need to respond quickly to the digital deficit and set out to access surplus devices in the community, reset them and distribute to families and individuals that were badly in need of them. Having discussed this model with several partners including the CPP Outcome 3 group, it was agreed that rolling this model out to other communities in Argyll and Bute would be beneficial and could help address some of the digital inequalities.

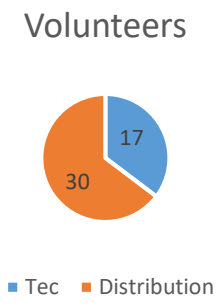
To move things forward at the pace required Argyll and Bute Council Community Learning staff worked with partners to roll this model out into the communities of Cowal, Helensburgh, Lochgilphead and Oban.

Essentially, the project involved the following stages –

- Recruitment of volunteers
- Appeals to local communities for surplus, unused digital devices
- Collection and processing of the equipment for use.
- Identifying referrals
- Distributing devices
- Offering support and instruction

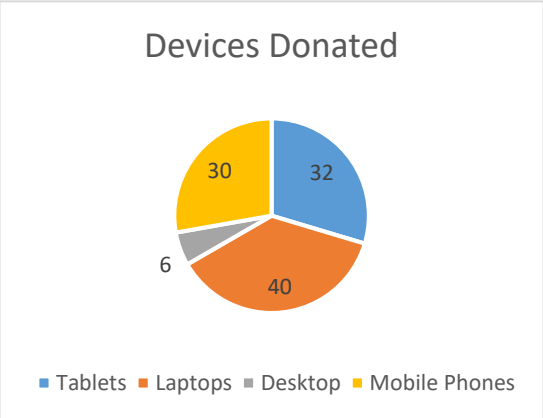
Volunteers

47 volunteers came forward offering to assist with technical duties and distribution.



Short briefing sheets/user guides have been drawn up and are being issued with devices. We will continue to develop new written information, which we acknowledge is not ideal but in most cases the best we can offer until the CoVid19 restrictions are relaxed.

Work is underway with tech volunteers to consider a very basic telephone support system for project users only. Also planned for when we progress through the recovery phases is the development of digital mentors, which will encourage the involvement of young people and the potential for inter-generational work. There is also potential for the digital mentors to support the implementation of Connecting Scotland.

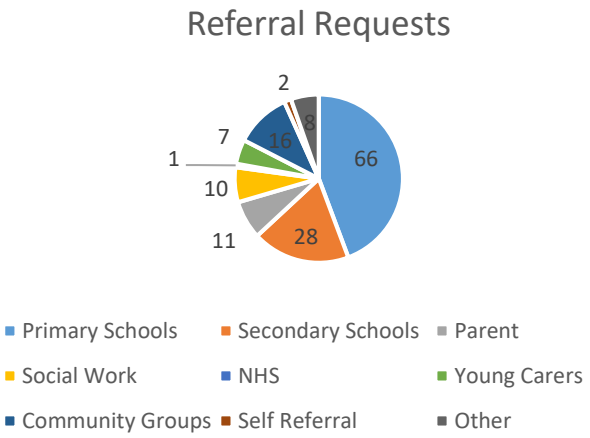


Devices

109 devices have been donated by members of the public following requests on social media. Unfortunately, some of the devices are unusable but most are processed and repurposed. Surprisingly, mobile phones have been in great demand from a variety of organisations. A successful partnership bid to the Wellbeing Fund has enabled the project to purchase refurbished laptops with keyboards and a mouse. To date 133 have been issued to individuals and families requiring digital access.

Referrals

To ensure a speedy response, it was agreed early on not to devise and implement a complicated referral and assessment process – in practice the project depends on referrals from partners already working with people requiring support. If a partner agency makes a referral it's on the basis that they know the individual, have a good understanding of their situation and support their need for a device.



Security

Laptops/Desktops have proved particularly challenging due to concerns regarding residual data on machines that are donated. Following considerable discussion and research into this subject it was agreed to –

- Wipe all hard drives and reformat with a new operating system. Whilst it is acknowledged that this will not completely solve this problem it would require significant technical expertise and specialist forensic software to access any remaining data.
- All individuals donating devices complete a disclaimer recognising that steps will be taken to remove as much data as possible from the devices but its likely small amounts may remain.
- The source and destination of each device is recorded.

Thankfully, a number of volunteers that came forward have high levels of technical expertise and experience, which has made the processing of machines much easier.

Digital Connections Summary

Since the start of the project –

- 47 volunteers have been recruited
- 109 devices have been donated by the general public
- 107 donated devices have been processed and issued to individuals and families
- 133 reconditioned laptops/keyboards/mouse/camera have been issued to individuals and families.
- Majority of referrals came for families with children in primary school.

F. Future, Planned Work:

1. Investigate possibilities to work with local businesses and the wider community to set up School Clothing Banks in each of your main towns and islands. These banks would have both new and second hand clothing available for parents and would be offsite for schools and hosted within the communities. Consider how to support existing School Clothing Banks.

2. Continue the engagement with harder to reach groups in our communities and their support agencies affected by poverty. Set up a reference group for future engagement and ensure that the Council/NHS and community planning partners continue to focus policies etc. around the impacts that it has on poverty experienced people. Ensure that EQIA's and CRWIA's are carried out and the results published.

3. Consider Developing and delivering a training package on Poverty Awareness for delivery to staff in our organisations and across the whole of our area. This to be delivered to multi-agency staff groups within a, to be agreed, timescale and virtually if covid19 makes this necessary.

4. To consider the creation of a single brand and /or a single mechanism for communicating and promoting our skills, experience and this to include a multi-agency approach to those affected by poverty in Argyll and Bute and to look at improving our communication with the public and lived experience groups. Look at the possibility of creating a single banner support agencies/public sector organisations could all sign up to; something like Anti-Poverty Argyll, branding logo – facebook/Instagram/twitter feeds re what we all deliver how etc.

5. We will examine the feasibility of providing free meals (or equivalent) during the holiday periods, for children and young people entitled to free school meals. We note that entitlement to free school meals, in Argyll and Bute, has increased by 11% compared with September last year and is likely to rise still further.

6. In order to determine the needs and aspirations of children within the Gypsy/Traveller community, we will look to introduce biannual reporting of the number of children on Gypsy/Traveller Sites with a view to developing suitable services".

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