

4th March 2021

Agenda Item No. 5

Tackling Poverty and Crisis Prevention

Report by: Michael Enston, Executive Director – Communities

Wards Affected: All Wards

Purpose

The recommendations in this report have been developed from research findings and discussions at the Tackling Poverty & Crisis Prevention Elected Member Working Group and a cross-service Project Group, as well as feedback from services, groups and individuals on the experience of supporting people during the pandemic.

Recommendation(s)

1. Agree the proposed People and Place local arrangements as the building block of a stronger community led approach.
2. Adopt the ethos of no wrong door in the redesign of relevant service, contact and referral arrangements and agree a test of change in one area of Fife.
3. Note the requirement for further analysis on the impact of spend, potential reappraisal of priorities and improved local coordination of funding.
4. Agree to bring forward proposals to committee on food and welfare support including a cost reduction and concessions scheme.
5. Agree the need for revised leadership arrangements to provide strategic direction and local support to anti-poverty and crisis prevention work.

Resource Implications

There are no immediate resource implications associated with this report.

Legal & Risk Implications

There are no specific legal and risk implications associated with this report.

Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed and is not necessary at this stage, as the proposals within the report do not currently represent a change to policy.

Consultation

This report has been developed through partner and service discussions, consultation with individuals and groups involved in the community response to

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The aim of the reform work was to build on lessons learned from the initial response and community support provided during the Covid-19 crisis and set out how those lessons could be developed into practice going forward.
- 1.2 This was not a review of Fife's overall approach to tackling poverty and did not set out to look at the effectiveness of individual policy initiatives. The Fairness Matters report of the Fairer Fife Commission in November 2015 had set the agenda which the Council and Fife Partnership have pursued, with progress across a range of recommendations reported through the Plan for Fife and more recently the joint reporting on the Local Child Poverty Action Report. This report on Tackling Poverty & Crisis Prevention is not seeking to be another Fairer Fife Commission but aims to build on the recommendations with lessons learned from the pandemic. The original Fairer Fife recommendations and progress will be reviewed as part of the development of the Plan For Fife refresh.
- 1.3 This report focuses on lessons learned and considers how these might be built into the way the system of support operates. To help do this, the Communities and Housing Services Sub-Committee Working Group and the cross-service Project Team sought the views of people involved in the community response, commissioned specific pieces of research and looked at case studies and projects in Fife and elsewhere.
- 1.4 The evidence from this work suggests that the existing system could operate more effectively in ensuring the right type of help, in the right way and at the right time. This requires greater collaboration between services locally. The overall theme is how to build on the opportunity to both accelerate and strengthen a shift towards collaborative and joined up support to individuals and families through an approach which values and helps sustain local and informal networks of support.

2.0 Covid-19 and Community Need

- 2.1 The response to the pandemic has demonstrated the benefits of staff working together with a shared focus. In our consultation, respondents noted the positive change in culture during the pandemic. The collaborative effort across services brought with it a sense of power to effect change. This was often linked with an ethos of getting things done with fewer boundaries and a strong sense of mutual support. This was at times enabled by rapid changes in our service provision sometimes requiring us to set aside existing systems and processes. These changes allowed people and the organisations they work for to respond flexibly and with empathy.
- 2.2 Communities themselves have played a key role in responding to the emergency. A wide range of local resilience groups, community groups and volunteers have provided a fast and flexible response to meeting local needs. This community effort underlines the importance of putting communities at the heart of future recovery and reform plans.

- 2.3 However, long standing challenges remain. Before the pandemic, 58% of Fifers were managing well financially while 32% were getting by alright. 8% don't manage well while 1% are in deep financial trouble. This is similar to Scotland as a whole (Scottish Household Survey, 2019). Since then, the pandemic has undoubtedly had a negative impact on many household's finances in Fife.
- 2.4 Poverty remains a major issue in Fife and despite an ambition to improve this and some encouraging results, overall, we are not seeing significant progress and there may even be signs that in some respects the situation is getting worse. For instance, levels of child poverty are higher than expected relative to the rest of Scotland and this is expected to increase.
- 2.5 The drivers of poverty are complex and long standing, the factors at work are deeply intertwined, meaning that it is not possible to pinpoint single root causes for poverty. However, some key factors give an indication of the issues. For instance, the employment rate in Fife (75.2%) is higher than the Scottish average (74.1%) but a higher proportion of those (20.8%) earn below the living wage compared to Scotland (19.4%). A review of the ambitions in the Plan for Fife (Fife Strategic Assessment) suggests that we are not on track to make an ambitious impact on poverty and the subsequent effect of Covid-19 exacerbates this.
- 2.6 It is clear that we are facing a combination of social and financial challenges that are driving the need to re-think approaches to supporting community wellbeing. Over the last ten years, public services have come under increased pressure, both financially, from the implementation of austerity measures, including a series of welfare reform changes, and socially, from increased need and demand for mitigation and crisis services. It has proven very difficult in that environment to realise the Christie Commission on Public Service Reform ambition for a major shift toward prevention and investment in the kind of support which might avoid crisis.
- 2.7 The front-line experience over the last year is that lots of people who required assistance had long-term, existing needs, illustrating the need for services and support that tackle disadvantage earlier to prevent further decline. The need for a different approach is not therefore simply a consequence of the pandemic. This has been recognised in national research into what works and a number of Councils including Fife have adopted community led approaches which recognise the need for a change in the way in which public services operate.
- 2.8 The experience of the pandemic does provide an opportunity to reflect on how public services work with people to provide support and enable lasting change. A theme from experience and successful service redesign elsewhere is the importance of building change on an understanding that:
- Our work is about supporting people to have control and improve their own quality of life.
 - Small empowering interactions between people and service providers, at key moments, can potentially boost a person's psychological resources which can, in turn, increase their ability to overcome disadvantage.
 - Place-based solutions work especially when they start with an understanding of the assets, stakeholders and relationships in a locality and build from there, recognising that how success is defined and pursued might look very different in different places.
 - The range of people who can and should contribute to solving social problems is broad. Building this "community capital" needs to be a key purpose of community planning.

2.9 We consider below how existing practice might change by drawing on these principles and building from the experience of the community response to Covid-19 to provide a renewed common purpose to tackling poverty in Fife.

3.0 People & Place - The Community Team

3.1 The pandemic has shown the will of communities to work together. This has been grounded very much in a sense of place rather than through any particular service or area of work. Fife has experience in place-based approaches and has worked through decentralised approaches for a long time. Reviews of decentralisation in Fife have however often highlighted a disconnect with service and partner alignment of strategy and resource.

3.2 This aspect had been the subject of a recent review through the existing Plan for Fife. In considering the conclusions of this work, the Council Leadership Team in March 2020 had proposed the adoption of a number of principles through which to strengthen the approach to decentralisation and place leadership. These are set out in the graphic below:

Figure 1: Place Leadership Service Commitment

As Council Services, we will:



3.3 Historically, area management had focused more strongly on fostering collaboration and common purpose around particular aspects of place e.g. regeneration efforts, community assets, green space, town centre development. People focussed place initiatives tended to be organised more through professional networks within Children’s Services or Social Care. The response to the pandemic involved a blurring of these distinctions toward a single team approach to providing support – the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT).

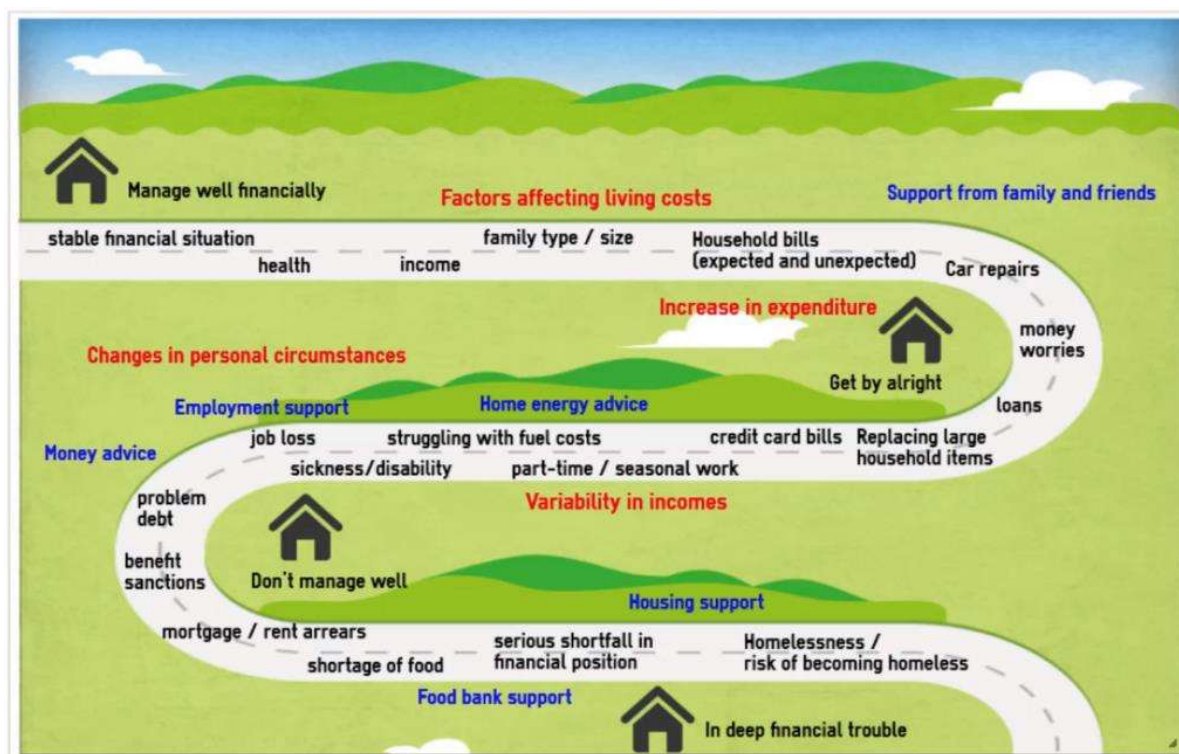
3.4 The MDT approach, which was established in each of the seven areas, has been recognised as key to the effectiveness of Fife’s crisis response to the pandemic. In June 2020, the Council reviewed the initial experience of the Covid-19 response and noted that MDTs were a key contributor to nurturing a common purpose, clear focus and appetite to remove barriers. Respondents to the consultation on the impact of Covid-19 on local communities and services highlighted the importance of MDTs being part of a wider system of learning, innovation and scaling up effective local responses. As such they should be cross-partner, and not simply a mechanism for bringing Council services together.

- 3.5 The conclusion from the response to the pandemic and the way area teams operated is that services were better engaged, there was improved information sharing, better links with third sector and community organisations, and more effective informal working supported by frequent and short virtual meetings. The message is clear and supports the previous conclusions on the need for effective place and people leadership arrangements that are reflective of the different situations in each area.
- 3.6 Our evolution from the experience during the pandemic should therefore be based on a recognition that a ‘people’ and ‘place’ approach is the underpinning reform, and should be central to service recovery plans and to our work with community planning partners.
- 3.7 A ‘people’ and ‘place’ approach is predicated on whole system change and, as such, requires large scale intervention. This requires us to:
- consider complex issues from multiple perspectives as part of a *whole area approach*
 - *challenge culture and practice* which holds us back
 - invest in *local leadership* to drive improvements in outcomes
 - design and deliver services in a way that is more *responsive to the needs of people and communities* – and in a more streamlined and efficient way
 - *re-weave national policies together with local priorities* and implement them within the constraints and opportunities of a local operating context.
- 3.8 People focussed local leadership would be expected to become the norm in each area with services and partners committing to work through a “community team” multi-disciplinary approach. This will be supported by partners as a system change requiring continuing strategic leadership support and priority. Local Leadership Teams, through Community Managers, will guide and shape local service responses, taking account of local priorities and legislative functions. All service management teams have been tasked with reviewing local service delivery to make sure management arrangements, operations and resourcing support this approach.
- 3.9 All service management teams have been tasked with reviewing local service delivery to make sure management arrangements, operations and resourcing support this approach. Implementing People and Place Leadership groups across the areas with documented terms of reference and representation will be the next step but ensuring council officers and partners are supported to work, build culture and effective relationships to deliver local priorities will be key. This is an important change and requires consistent leadership support to realise the ambition beyond the immediate crisis response.

4.0 Contact and Support - No Wrong Door

- 4.1 The infographic below shows how factors affecting living costs, increased expenditure, variability in incomes and changes in personal circumstances can interact to move households back and forward along the spectrum from managing well and getting by alright, to not managing well and being in deep financial trouble.

Figure 2: Journey map of how households are managing financially, showing factors impacting on ability to manage well and the level of support required



- 4.2 Services and organisations form a complex system of customer contact processes which our communities rely on in times of hardship. We know that individuals seeking help with an immediate problem, may have multiple issues that require support. Where there are a range of supports available, from organisations with different policies and processes, there is the risk that responses are repeatedly reactive to fixing the immediate crisis but fail collectively to address other issues an individual may have.
- 4.3 During the early months of the pandemic, the Council and partners established services like the COVID Community Helpline and Fife Voluntary Action’s Helping Hand initiative to provide a range of support to people. Community support was coordinated across seven areas through Community Assistance Hubs. These new services involved substantial changes to the way the Council and partners had to operate, with many staff undertaking essential roles that were different to their normal duties. Staff reported feeling empowered and able to make educated decisions and managed risks without the need to ask for permission, which allowed them to respond to the emergency and demonstrate leadership on the front line.
- 4.4 In addition, respondents to the consultation felt that they should be able to make decisions and refer people onto other services regardless of what route they made contact (a ‘no wrong door’ approach) and look more holistically at how organisations and services solve people’s problems. This would also be a basis to anticipate other potential problems a person has and be able to respond to that in a proactive, preventative approach.
- 4.5 Considering elements like an individual’s wider situation, particularly their family circumstances and local area, could provide intelligence for building individually targeted support. The community teams reported that in responding to specific requests they got to know individuals and families better and could see where other supports would help.

- 4.6 This no wrong door approach is also being developed through reform work on Homelessness. The links between poverty and homelessness are well documented. The Homelessness Reform workstream is ongoing and has focussed on the following key areas to improve customer service and alleviate the impact of poverty and the pandemic on households.
- Increasing the focus on homelessness prevention and early intervention by enhancing housing advice and case management.
 - Reducing transitions for households where temporary accommodation is unavoidable by converting temporary accommodation to a permanent tenancy.
 - Increasing the range of housing with support options to provide enhanced support to vulnerable households.
 - Developing innovative offers of support to sustain tenancies in the private rented sector.
 - Improving access to advice and support services through the creation of housing advice hubs which are locally based and available virtually / digitally.
- 4.7 A 'no wrong door' approach is about ensuring that people in crisis can get access to the support they need no matter what service they are engaging with. Building the community team through local people and place leadership is clearly an important foundation for this. It also requires simplified and common processes of contact and referral, a reappraisal of how services are accessed through local offices and community centres, the use of a single point of contact for vulnerable people and a potential redesign of how services such as housing, Community Learning and Development and Social Work collaborate to support individual communities.
- 4.8 The working group started to look at these areas, drew on research from other Councils and reviewed a project now underway to simplify contact and referral. Moving forward there is an attraction to now put in place a programme in one area of Fife to develop a redesigned model of delivery.

5.0 Funding and Support – building on what works

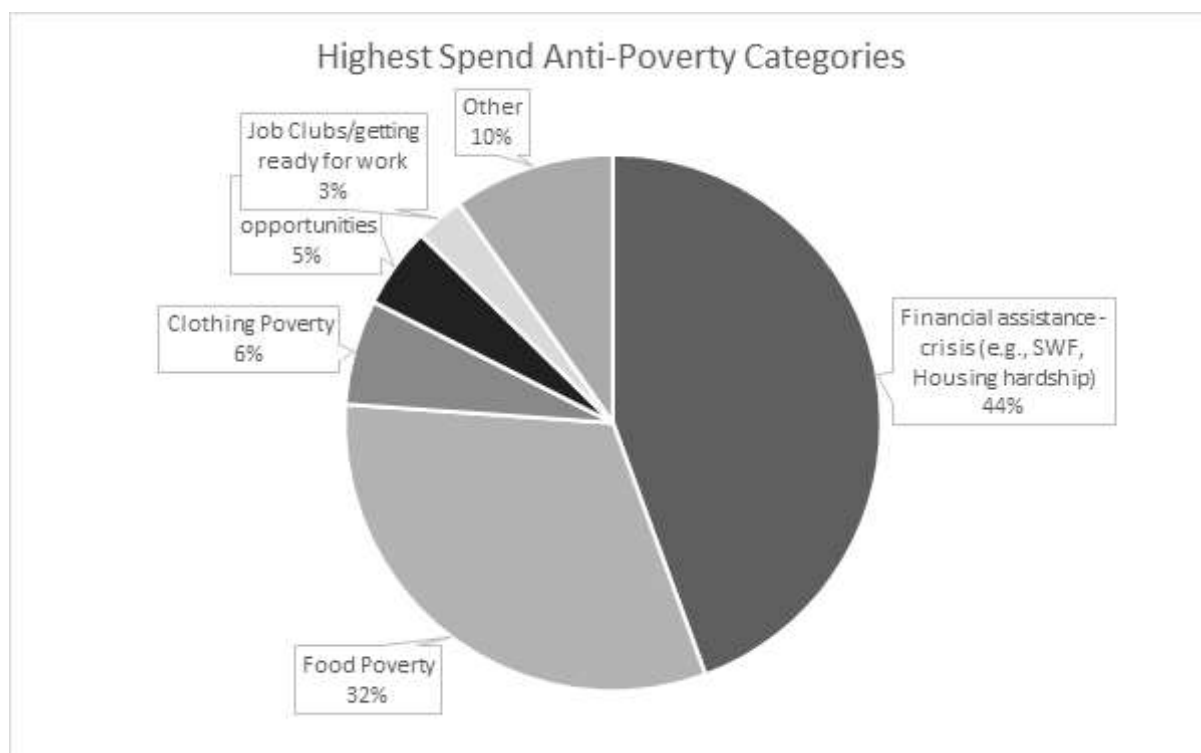
- 5.1 The response to the pandemic involved a significant increase in crisis support services including welfare payments, advice and provision of food. A key consideration for this area of reform is the shape and extent of such support going forward and how to expand and sustain community initiatives and particularly those which work directly with users in terms of participation and the provision of wider support.
- 5.2 Research throughout the pandemic has shown that there has been a surge in emergency food parcels being handed out across the UK. From Fife's experience there has been an increase in demand for community food outlets and new provisions have been set up as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. However, this is not a realistic solution to food insecurity in the long-term and many respondents to the consultation reported concerns about sustaining the effort.
- 5.3 Before the pandemic, chronic food insecurity was identified as an issue plaguing many individuals in Fife who are reliant on free or low-cost food from Food Banks and/or food pantries. Whilst there will still be a need to provide emergency food to individuals and families in crisis, there are ways to address the question of sustainability.

- 5.4 Empowering people by enabling their access to services and knowledge and creating self-sufficiency should be the basis to alleviate food poverty and address related issues such as the knowledge or means to prepare and cook food. There are examples in Fife where organisations and services have provided cooking lessons to build skills - the recent Café Inc to Go project in South & West Fife worked with several families to develop their confidence in the kitchen. The project had other benefits too – reducing isolation and strengthening family relationships. There are projects like this across Fife, but these have not been scaled up. There were suggestions made by some respondents around the use of Council facilities, like schools which could be used to provide some of these services.
- 5.5 A Fife Food Plan needs to be developed to set out how partners can work collaboratively and locally to build food security in Fife over the medium and long-term. Food has been such an important issue throughout the pandemic and has raised wider questions around supply and waste. Food production, distribution and waste have significant impact on carbon emissions as well as being impacted by the effects of climate change. Our approach to food going forward needs to align and support the wider economic and environmental challenges within Fife.
- 5.6 Prevention of food insecurity has to be the key element in the plan for food in the long-term. The plan needs to look at how we support individuals and families who are accessing support, not only with food, but with a wider network of wraparound support, which could include welfare support, money advice, income maximisation, clothing, furniture and fuel top-ups. Work is already underway with funding secured to enable CARF to work alongside community food providers to offer structured support assistance around income maximisation and debt management. The project provides a good opportunity to consider how income maximisation can be embedded into the food network in order to provide people with a more holistic approach to support.
- 5.7 Specifically, a Fife Food Plan will seek to address the following:
- Low income and job insecurity
 - Debt
 - Access to local, low cost, high quality food products
 - Low levels of positive mental wellbeing
 - Low levels of literacy and numeracy skills to balance household budgets
 - Community leadership/ownership of actions to tackle root causes of poverty
 - Basic food skills – storage, cooking, food labels and food safety
- 5.8 In looking at the approach to tackling food insecurity the working group also reviewed the effectiveness of related projects and initiatives. A starting point for this was to look at spend on anti-poverty work specifically. With around £34m spent annually on anti-poverty work and with the Strategic Assessment suggesting that significant impact is not being achieved, a review of this poverty spending was undertaken to better understand the impact it is having.
- 5.9 Some 442 projects were examined (those projects where information was available). Information was collected directly from project leads about the types of spending being undertaken (figure 3) where possible. The largest category (44%) related to financial assistance in time of crisis. Along with crisis spending, two categories make up over 75% of all spending.

Figure 3: The highest spend anti-poverty categories

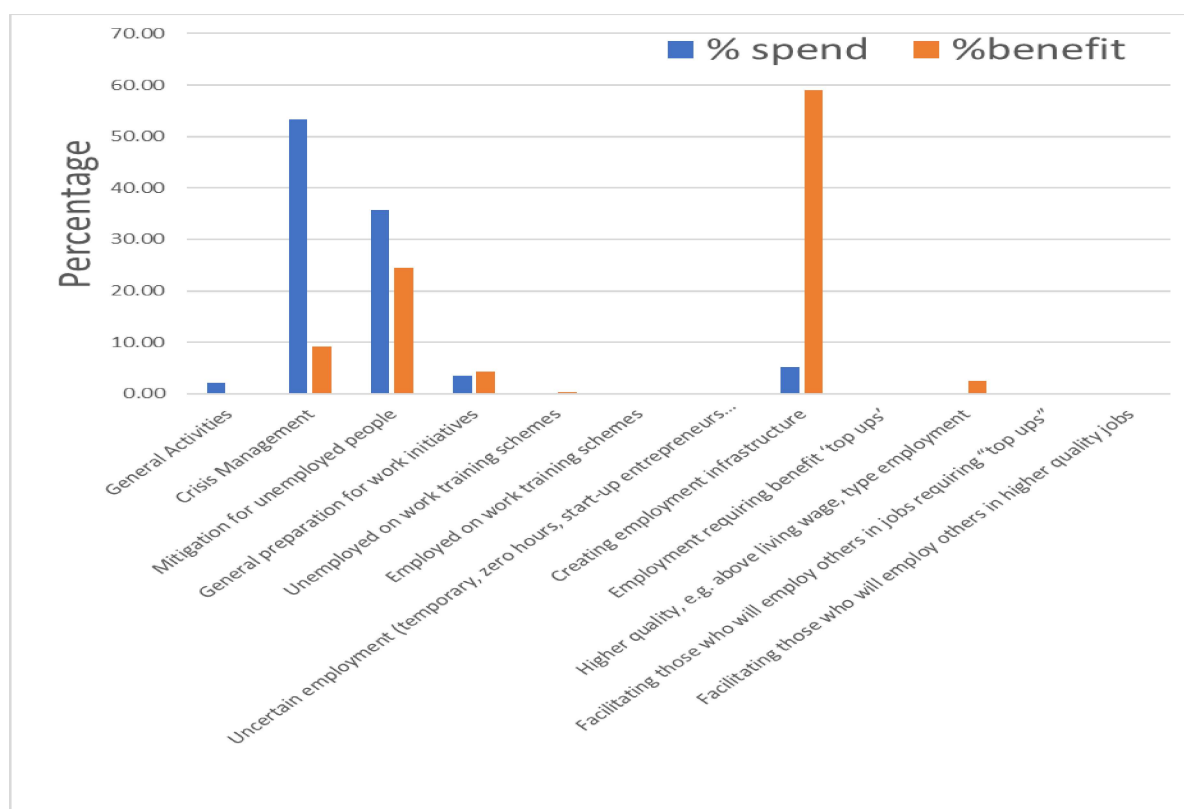
Category	£ spend	% total
Financial assistance - crisis (e.g., SWF, Housing hardship)	£9,100,000	44.0
Food Poverty	£6,500,000	32.0
Clothing Poverty	£1,300,000	6.3
Employment opportunities	£1,000,000	4.9
Job Clubs/getting ready for work	£600,000	3.0
Other	£2,000,000	9.8

Categories greater than 1% of spending excluding Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). £ spend rounded to nearest £100,000.



5.10 Modelling spend against return-on-investment ratios (figure 4) obtained from other studies shows that 90% of all spending is on crisis management and mitigation for unemployed people and delivers about 34% of all long-term benefit. The largest benefit is derived from creating employment infrastructure with 59% of benefit being delivered from only 4.9% of spending. While crisis management is essential, it is less effective than other activities at generating longer term benefit and that even a small rebalance towards activities which can assist people out of poverty are better value for money. Activities such as preparing people for work, ensuring there are jobs for people who have been unemployed and paying the living wage are examples of activities that could derive better long term value and prevent more people from falling into poverty.

Figure 4: Spend to Benefit results



The chart shows activities (left to right) with increasing benefit for investment. It shows that spend is more focused on crisis management (left), while more benefit is derived from a smaller spend on activities to the right.

- 5.11 Generally, the analysis of anti-poverty spending highlighted that while projects are worthwhile in their own right, the profile of work is a series of discrete small-scale projects. Information on actual impact is difficult to pin down and tangible targets are not often present. This suggests that there is scope to develop a more systematic way to target anti-poverty spending focussed on tangible impact. In particular, to consider how projects closer to the 'tipping points' of helping remove people from poverty can be resourced.
- 5.12 Respondents to the consultation highlighted that the different funding streams were often managed in isolation and to the sometimes-unhelpful requirements of funders. There was suggestion that using the knowledge of teams and partners working in the local areas could assist in directing how such funding is spent and could offer opportunities for more collaboration with other services and organisations. Areas are best placed to constantly review provision and identify and address any gaps. With several Covid-19 funding streams likely to come to an end, there is a need to review these and identify any gaps in provision that could impact the level of support provided to people and families in crisis.
- 5.13 The conclusion from this review of funding streams and feedback from respondents is that there is scope to better coordinate funding streams and to enhance evaluation of impact and development or scaling up of what works. The new area arrangements should provide that mechanism for joint consideration and help shift focus toward a longer-term perspective on delivery. This should be enabled by funding streams that are coordinated locally with greater flexibility in terms of funding rules. Building on the reforms proposed in the two previous sections this has the potential to develop service commissioning at an area level.

- 5.14 The final aspect of funding which the working group looked at was direct financial support and cost reduction. The local teams, in particular, have found that greater flexibility to use cash payments has helped prevent an immediate crisis. The group also looked at cost reduction and concessions. A new pricing and concessions policy is being developed for physical activity, sport and leisure and there is felt to be significant scope to include other areas of concessions and cost reduction.
- 5.15 That would not necessarily be confined to council services. For example, the group looked at recent research into transport barriers in North East Fife such as being able to travel to a new job, accessing social security or travel for food. In another example medical charges for certification were identified as a barrier for people on very low incomes where a comparatively modest charge represented a significant portion of weekly income.
- 5.16 Further work is needed to explore issues of cost and local welfare funding further and proposals will be developed in parallel with the creation of a new concessions approach for leisure and wellbeing. The output would be the introduction of a concessions policy covering a range of services and recommendations on crisis and grant funding.

6.0 Reviewing Progress – leadership & culture

- 6.1 This reform stresses the need for improved collaboration across services and organisations to break down the potentially detrimental impact on people of services or professional contact operating in isolation or with different approaches, policies and ethos. Part of this is how we support people to maintain that culture of working together alongside communities.
- 6.2 Respondents to the consultation often mentioned the role of leadership in setting a direction for the anti-poverty agenda in Fife and noted that culture was key to how we tackle poverty and crisis prevention going forward. The value of having a shared vision was recognised with many respondents highlighting that the pandemic crisis had brought services together. Emergencies motivate people in a different way than during normal times but there are fears services could go back to prioritising their work in isolation and losing sight of the collaborative approach that worked so well during the first lockdown. There is a desire in short to set a renewed purpose in tackling poverty supported with fewer priorities and continuing leadership support to enabling teams to get on and deliver.
- 6.3 Existing partnerships provided good foundations for connecting partners together during lockdown. Partners were able to come together through existing networks to support people during the crisis. One respondent to the consultation highlighted that in their local area there is a sense that the community has a greater level of trust in organisations and there is an opportunity to build on that trust.
- 6.4 Furthermore, respondents felt that when it comes to producing plans and strategies or developing projects and services, many Council Services already have ideas of what they want to do before they go out to consult the public. Doing this won't build on the trust that has been developed this past year. On engagement, respondents felt there was a need to make it easier to hear people's voices on matters, whether that be through making engagement more community led or better involvement of the front-line workers in shaping policy and strategy.

- 6.5 Currently we have different partnership groups and committees touching on anti-poverty strategy and focus e.g., children's services, community wellbeing, and welfare reform. There is scope to simplify this landscape and in so doing to sharpen the focus on results and what works. The Plan for Fife Review will review strategic partnership arrangements, but more can be done to ensure there is better synergy between the strategic anti-poverty direction and local working.
- 6.6 Going forward it is suggested that the Plan for Fife needs to have a central focus on tackling poverty with associated leadership at a strategic level to support and embed new area arrangements and facilitate the kind of changes to structures, approaches and culture outlined in this report.

7.0 Final Note

- 7.1 One of the benefits of this short-term reform work has been the opportunity to stand back and review practice through a different lens, in this case, from the crisis response to pandemic. Innovation, Intelligence, data and evaluation are all critical to the success of this agenda and need to be a strong feature of the revised leadership and partnership focus on anti-poverty work. Nesta identify a number of perspectives critical to innovating and developing solutions to long standing seemingly intractable issues.
1. **Look from underneath**, at the experiences of the people whose need is being addressed, to understand their lives and how the service fits in. Do not just look at current public services for people but how people live and how they could be better supported to live well. Even a few intensive case studies can yield insights rich enough to trigger radical innovation.
 2. **Look from above**, to see the system as a whole that a service is a part of and identify all the possible resources a community has to address the need. This might involve looking at how multiple public services could combine, with voluntary, third sector, informal and private solutions. By looking from above solutions that might have seemed too ambitious or complex might become more plausible.
 3. **Look sideways** to draw inspiration from other services and solutions, which might be like the one you are searching for, which have proved effective for this group. This might include looking at retail formats and digital tools, for example. One of the best ways to have a new idea is to borrow it from an adjacent sector.
 4. **Look backwards** to take a fresh look at what's been tried before, what has worked, and what hasn't gone so well. This will present some exciting opportunities for fresh perspectives.
 5. **Look forward**, to project and forecast how younger consumers will want the service to work for them in future. This can help to reveal how dated and detached traditional public service formats can feel.

Source: Nesta (2013) *Creative Councils: 10 lessons of local authority innovators*
https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/creative_councils_10_lessons.pdf

Background Papers

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1973:

- *Fairness Matters*, Fairer Fife Commission – November 2015

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