

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET30 May 2024Report by Director of Business Operations & PartnershipsCOVID RESERVE – HUMANITARIAN PROGRESS AND IMPACT OF FUND**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with a final update on the progress of humanitarian projects that were allocated COVID reserve funding for the **2023/2024** financial year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Note the impact made by humanitarian projects in 2023/2024 from funding through the Covid Reserves (Annex 1).
  - b) Note the outstanding projects that will continue into the 2024/2025 financial year.
  - c) Approve the uncommitted balance of £131,672 that will be transferred to HSCP to assist with 2023/24 in-year budget pressures and COVID Related impact.

**BACKGROUND**Reserve Funding

3. From October 2022 a total of £4.69m was approved by Cabinet towards humanitarian projects. Proposals were put forward to Cabinet in [autumn 2022](#) amounting to £1.7m, in [May 2023](#) at £1.7m and the third proposal was presented in [November 2023](#) for a final amount of £1.54m which included some underspend from the previous amounts.

4. It was agreed in the November 2023 paper that any uncommitted underspend remaining in the COVID reserves at year-end 2023/24 be allocated to the HSCP to assist with 2023/24 in-year budget pressures and COVID-related impact, if HSCP was unable to bring spend back into target.

5. Additionally, the Scottish Government released funding for Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery Fund (LACER) to support local economic recovery and the cost-of-living impacts on low-income households. An update on the impact of the £1.469m fund for East Renfrewshire was presented to [Cabinet in October 2023](#).

6. This paper will outline the significant impact made through additional resources delivered in partnership across the authority. The primary focus has been to support with Covid recovery; however, it has allowed the Council and partners to mitigate some cost-of-living pressures in the short-term.

## REPORT

### Progress of 2023/2024 COVID Reserve Humanitarian Funding

7. Annex 1 outlines all the humanitarian projects that were funded for the 2023/24 period. It provides an update on spend against allocation, and the progress made by each project. It also indicates the projects that will continue into 2024/25 where funds have already been committed.

8. The humanitarian interventions outlined in the Annex demonstrate a partnership response to responding to residents' needs across a number of areas: direct financial support; advice and support services; mental health and wellbeing recovery, community capacity building and organisational recovery.

9. The combined allocation of the funds has provided significant support to residents, communities and staff throughout 2023/24 and the following outlines just a few examples of impact:

- East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (ERCAB) received funding for five posts in total: an older persons' advisor, fuel advisor, money advisor, benefits advisor and housing advisor. During 2023/24, ERCAB assisted a total of 2,583 people with client financial gains of £1,752,213 and consolidated £1,581,728 of debt. Funding for these posts will continue into 2024/25 at a cost of £114,000. An additional £10,000 was given to CAB for 2023/2024 to support with housing related presentations.
- During winter of 2023/24, 29 community groups were funded to support residents by providing food and transport and wellbeing activities in a range of community locations. Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire (VAER) also received 123 referrals from the HSCP to provide shopping support to vulnerable residents and help to attend crucial appointments.
- Barrhead Housing Association and East Renfrewshire Council Housing (ERC) received an injection of funds to support residents experiencing financial hardship and at risk of homelessness. 53 households were supported by BHA with direct payments or purchasing assistance to furnish homes to make them warmer. ERC provided support to 36 tenants to sustain their tenancy, and with significant increases with homeless presentations, we were able to support individuals with additional associated costs related to emergency accommodation. Additionally, through the Young Persons' Housing Support worker, 28 young people were assisted with practical tasks, supporting housing applications, facilitating moves to permanent tenancies, referrals to MART and building skills in everyday household management.

- 225 carers were given additional discretionary financial support to alleviate pressures.
- Winter support payments of £100 were awarded to 2000 children at Christmas, and 211 families received shopping vouchers via Social Work.
- Alongside financial support and advice, the humanitarian funds have also been used to rebuild capacity within our communities. This investment has allowed for three Participatory Budgeting (PB) steering groups to develop in Mearns Village, Busby and Eaglesham and PB events across all 6 communities saw over 1500 residents vote and 73 projects receiving funding. An additional 12 groups were funded through the Food Growing PB event. We have also seen the reinvigoration of a community-led equalities forum with a successful launch event held on 1 May 2024.

10. Several funded projects will continue into 2024/25 to continue service delivery and support residents and families. Many of these are via the Education Department and will align with term time. These projects are outlined in Annex 1 and include: the Early Years Language & Social Communication project, Family First Early Intervention Project and youth work in Barrhead.

11. As agreed by Cabinet, the Director of Business Operations & Partnerships and Head of Accountancy, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, have exercised some flexibility in relation to a small number of areas. This has included allocating £10,000 to ERCAB for housing pressures as outlined in paragraph 9, and £40,000 to allow MART to provide discretionary payments in 2024/25, taken from in year 2023/24 underspends.

## **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

12. The various streams of COVID funding from the Scottish Government have now ended. Any continued needs identified will be explored strategically through core budget setting processes.

13. Given the well-documented COVID-related service pressures affecting the HSCP and the current projected in-year overspend, it was recommended in November 2023 that any uncommitted underspend remaining in the COVID reserves at year-end be allocated to the HSCP to assist with 2023/24 in-year budget pressures in the event that HSCP was unable to bring spend back into target. The uncommitted underspend on humanitarian projects at the end of 2023/24 to be allocated to the HSCP is £ 131,672.

14. In setting the Council's revenue budget for 2023/24, £3.254m of COVID reserves was also allocated to departmental budgets to assist with operational pressures still being experienced as a result of the pandemic. Any underspends confirmed in these areas as we finalise the closure of the Council's accounts for 2023/24 will also be transferred to HSCP to assist in addressing the in-year COVID pressures they have faced during 2023/24.

## **CONSULTATION & PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

15. A strong partnership approach has continued through the life of this funding. Our multi-agency cost-of-living group will continue to meet on a periodic basis and identify any external funding opportunities that may arise and ways of working together to target resources.

16. There is also current service design work being undertaken with support from the Scottish Government Digital Academy that involves consultation with stakeholders and potential engagement with people with lived experience to assist us to identify people experiencing financial vulnerability and poverty – this will be used in our approach to alleviating the impact of poverty.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

17. An [Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment](#) was completed in May 2023 to ensure that the distribution of funds reached those most in need and this continues to apply.

## CONCLUSION

18. This report gives Cabinet a final progress update on humanitarian projects that were allocated COVID reserve funding for the 2023/24 financial year. Among other interventions, the COVID reserve has allowed us to get targeted advice and financial support to residents most in need, to recruit posts to alleviate service pressures and reduce waiting lists; and to inject much-needed capacity building supports within our communities. In line with national trends, cost of living and post-pandemic challenges and pressures continue to be felt across our communities. We will continue to work in partnership to ensure support is targeted to those most in need.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

19. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the impact made by humanitarian projects in 2023/24 from funding through the Covid Reserves (Annex 1).
- b) Note the outstanding projects that will continue into the 2024/25 financial year.
- c) Approve the uncommitted balance of £131,672 that will be transferred to HSCP to assist with 2023/24 in-year budget pressures and COVID Related impact.

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## BACKGROUND PAPERS

Covid Reserve – Proposals, Cabinet 13 October 2022/ 11 May 2023/ 02 November 2023

Flexible Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery Fund, Cabinet 18 Aug/7 April 2022 & 12 October 2023

COVID-19 Humanitarian Support Community Funding, Cabinet 25 November 2021  
COVID-19 Humanitarian Support Funding 2021/22, Cabinet 3 June 2021

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## ANNEX 1

Covid Reserves 1- Allocated October 2022- progress made in 2023/24				
Category	Activity	Funds Allocated	Spend	Progress/Impact
Advice and support	CAB benefit advisor	£40,000	Full spend	Supported <b>170</b> clients with a financial gain of <b>£687,442</b> (this includes figures for 2022/23 period).
	CAB money advice and rights advisor	£40,000	Full Spend	Assisted <b>263</b> clients with a financial gain of <b>£23,136</b> and <b>£1,582,728</b> of debt consolidated.
Support for communities	Funding towards learning recovery in schools	£103,863	£33,521 carried into 24/25 to align with term time	Provided 1:1 support to <b>124</b> children and young people across <b>6</b> primary schools for numeracy and maths, <b>over 80</b> for literacy and <b>20</b> supported with their mental health and wellbeing, with a further <b>124</b> having received group support for anxiety. Project continued through May 2023 funding.
	Community capacity building and delivery of grant making Participatory budgeting	£187,500	£10,915 carried over for staffing till June	<b>£150,000</b> was given to Linking Communities to distribute across <b>6</b> community areas on behalf on the Council. Additional community capacity building supported the process.
	Detached streetwork and diversionary activity	£50,000	£16,610 carried forward to 24/25 to continue post	<b>396</b> different young people have participated in diversionary activities with <b>2727</b> interactions with young people during this programme. <b>10</b> young people have participated in the Fireskills programme and <b>96</b> in the Safer Choices Programme.
	Strategic Support to Third Sector	£50,000	Full spend	VAER led on strategic and partnership development of community hub/Talking Points, Food Dignity Network and winter planning
	Strategic and Partnership Coordination	£56,000	£15,352 underspend to HSCP	Additional capacity for strategic services to support humanitarian work.

Reducing fuel poverty	Fuel poverty officer post in MART	£44,500	£44,500 was reallocated in November 2023	Due to slippage in LACER, this post was funded through LACER in 23/24 and not Covid reserves.
	CAB Energy Advisor	£40,000	Full spend	<b>1914</b> clients have been seen, with a client financial gain of <b>£156,528</b> .
Mental Health and Wellbeing Support	Funding for one financial and mental wellbeing HR officer post	£60,000	£22,531 to be carried forward to 24/25	Supported <b>422</b> members of staff to access health checks, with nearly <b>300</b> resulting in urgent referrals for further action. Delivered <b>19</b> training sessions to <b>290</b> staff, <b>15</b> regular 1:1s and organised <b>71</b> wellbeing activities with <b>650</b> participants.

#### Covid Reserves 2 –Allocated May 2023- progress made in 2023/24

Category	Activity	Funds Allocated	Spend	Progress/Impact
Community recovery/ capacity building	Development of Talking Points	£48,000	Carry forward £27,049 to 24/25 for continued delivery	Post commenced in October 2023 to support the development and delivery of Talking Points. This added capacity, resilience and reach to the programme with the introduction of the Supporting People Framework.
	Recovery café spaces in health centres	£10,000	Full Spend	To support continued provision while contract was put in place for a Social Blend café in Eastwood Health Centre.
	Youth Work Project- Barrhead	£63,500	£24,667 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	A youth worker is now based in St Luke's High School to work with young people involved in anti-social behaviour in Barrhead. Various programmes have been delivered such as Respect ER, mental health and wellbeing, and vaping awareness
	Data analysis work- poverty,	£40,000	Full Spend	The tool has a focus on child poverty and using data to gather more profile information on financial vulnerability at a local level.

	hardship & cost of living			
	Community capacity building	£100,000	£53,641 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	Additional staffing for a community worker to support with continued PB activity. Funds were also allocated to a specific Food Growing PB initiative with <b>12</b> local groups receiving <b>3000</b> votes online. <b>3</b> new steering groups have been established with local residents being supported to plan, design and deliver grant-making PB in their local communities. In total over <b>1,500</b> residents voted with 73 projects being funded. There are ongoing developments for Community Wealth Building and a community conference for 24/25.
	Developing equalities in East Renfrewshire	£34,500	Full Spend	Outside the Box contracted to facilitate a community-led equalities network through a series of engagement workshops. The launch event in May was attended by 50+ attendees. CEMVO have worked with Council to develop an equality training resource.
COVID-19 contingency	HSCP winter staff to cover frontline service continuity	£250,000	Full spend	To address staff contingency pressures and to ensure essential frontline HSCP services could continue through winter and to the end of the financial year.
Direct financial advice and support to residents	Go-bags for domestic abuse survivors	£2,500	Full spend	<b>18</b> go-bags for Domestic Abuse Survivors including vouchers for supermarkets and other necessities were purchased and distributed to service users accessing social work and partner agencies.
	Support to fostering households	£11,000	Full spend	One-off support payments of <b>£500</b> per child were made to <b>15</b> fostering households who have been caring for children with complex needs.
	Money Advice and Rights Team (MART)- Discretionary Hardship Fund	£52,500	£52,500 reallocated in November 2023	This was funded through LACER for 23/24 due to slippage from previous financial year.
	MART- welfare liaison post for older people	£11,000	Full Spend	This post has assisted <b>300</b> older people, generating an income of <b>£750,000</b> for residents.
	Hardship payments staff	£33,000	Full Spend	This helped the service meet increased demand and process payments for residents facing financial hardship.

	Scottish Welfare Fund staff	£33,000	Full spend	This helped the service to meet increased demand and process payments for residents facing financial hardship.
	CAB older persons worker	£45,000	Full spend	<b>236</b> clients have been supported with a client financial gain of <b>£885,107</b> .
	Targeted communications on cost of living & financial hardship	£10,000	Underspend of £6,300 to HSCP	A campaign which included leaflet distribution, targeted social media and community magazine adverts was carried out and aimed at supporting mortgage repayments, energy bills and debt worries. The community magazine reached <b>20,000</b> per month, Barrhead News online <b>33,000</b> clicks and display ads <b>20,500</b> impressions
Organisational recovery	HSCP staff wellbeing programme - extension	£24,403	Full spend	Wellbeing officer in HSCP has delivered over <b>800</b> wellbeing activity sessions with over <b>1,600</b> attendees since taking up post 2 years ago. Activities included yoga, massage/reiki/reflexology and menopause support sessions.
	Council staff wellbeing programme (discretionary fund for activities)	£20,000	£7,897 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	This additional funding was used for supporting staff health checks and a menu of wellbeing activities for staff.
	Rebuilding staff Leadership Group network	£10,000	Underspend of £2,600 to HSCP	<b>2</b> cohorts of a Mental Fitness/ Positive Intelligence programme delivered to <b>70</b> senior managers. This has introduced tools to develop a growth mind-set and re-introduce networking and collaboration across leaders and managers from all departments.
	Isobel Mair School Staff Resilience / Bereavement Support	£3,300	£1497 Carry forward for 24/25 for continued delivery	<b>16 school staff</b> have been supported to recognise the signs of stress, vicarious trauma and burnout and how to support each other and the school community through bereavement.
	Justice Social Work - reducing backlog of Unpaid Work Hours	£5,100	Full Spend	The capacity of our unpaid work teams has increased significantly with the additional van, completing over <b>180 tasks</b> for the local community.

	Justice Social Work - materials for Unpaid Work Service to increase output	£4,000	Full Spend	Two Christmas markets raised a £1551 for a local charity.
	Environmental health	£59,000	Reallocated	This post was unable to be recruited and funds were reallocated to fund the additional CAB activity for £10,000 in 2023/24 and MART discretionary funds for 2024/25
Wellbeing support for individuals	Carers support	£80,000	£37,157 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	A carers dedicated social worker is in post. Staff absence has caused some impact on activity.
	Early Years Language & Social Communication	£255,410	£109,019 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	<b>40 children</b> supported across <b>14</b> early learning and childcare centres. Data from 4 children indicates they have improved their skills with a percentage rise between <b>36% and 85%</b>
	Family First Early Intervention Project	£44,422	£9,546 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	Practitioner in in post and working with families across the authority since September 2023. <b>73 families</b> supported with individual action plans.
	Young people affected by drugs and alcohol	£42,974	Full Spend	This funding has been used to support young people who have been involved in drugs and alcohol but do not meet the threshold for statutory services. There have been <b>18</b> young people supported.
	Housing Support for young people	£42,974	£16,046 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	This post started in October 2023. There have been <b>28</b> young people assisted with practical tasks, supporting housing applications, facilitating moves to permanent tenancies, referrals to MART and building skills in everyday household management.

	Mental Health Support for Children	£49,985	£20,385 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	<b>10</b> practitioners across Children's Service including CAMHS and Intensive Services are training in Sleep Counselling from Sleep Action to provide therapeutic interventions. .
	Healthier Minds Hub - Children & Young People's Mental & Emotional Wellbeing	£73,903	£31,307 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	<b>17</b> young people have been receiving additional support from an Educational Psychology Assistant and support worker, along with an evaluation of impact.
	Recovery support for Domestic Abuse Survivors	£37,271	Full spend	Both posts in place and Cedar training delivered in December. Activities delivered throughout year including a weekly wellbeing group with a focus on safety, self-care, emotional awareness and peer learning
	ASN- transition to adulthood	£90,861	Full spend	Support and assessment for transitions has been delivered to <b>156</b> young people
Funds nominally committed in May 2023 for autumn allocation	Winter support payment to those in receipt of Free School Meals and/or Clothing Grants as a result of low income	£61,440	Full Spend	Update in Table 3
	Social Work support to vulnerable families at Christmas	£10,000	Full Spend	Update in Table 3
	Winter support for local people & third sector partners	£40,957	Full spend	Update in Table 3

Covid Reserves 3 -Allocated November 2023- progress made in 2023/2024				
Category	Activity	Funds Allocated	Spend	Progress
Community recovery and capacity building	Detached youth services and skills development	£30,000	£30,000 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	To support an intensive summer intervention when children out of school are at increased risk, and continue the diversionary street work activity
	Winter support for local people and third sector partners	£9000 <b>(plus £40,957 allocated in May 2023)</b>	Full spend	<b>34</b> funding applications were received and awarded to <b>29</b> community groups to support residents over winter such as wellbeing, food and transport assistance
COVID-19 contingency	HSCP contingency support	£687,000	Full spend	Addressing significant staff contingency pressures and to ensure essential frontline HSCP services can continue through winter and to the end of the financial year.
Direct financial advice and support to residents	Winter support payment to families in receipt of free school meals and/or clothing grants due to low income	£168,560 <b>(Plus £61,440 Committed in May 2023)</b>	£17,800 Underspend to HSCP	Over <b>2000</b> children that receive free school meals and clothing grants received a payment of <b>£100</b> at Christmas.
	Support to vulnerable families at Christmas	£2000 (plus £10,000 committed in May 2023)	Full Spend	<b>211</b> families received vouchers for supermarkets at Christmas time through social work. The average voucher spend per family was around <b>£50</b> , with <b>15</b> more vulnerable families receiving up to <b>£150</b> .
	Carers Discretionary fund	£25,000	Full spend	<b>225</b> carers received discretionary payments which helped alleviate financial pressures.

	Food Dignity provision via food dignity network	£60,000	Full Spend	<b>23</b> funding applications from <b>20</b> community groups were processed as part of the Food Fund via the Food Dignity Network.
	Young people in aftercare Christmas support	£8,500	Full spend	<b>94</b> care experienced young people were given a gift, attended a Christmas dinner or support to attend a social event.
	Back to School Bank	£10,000	Full Spend	Provided <b>123</b> school uniforms to children across East Renfrewshire of all ages, with an average spend of <b>£76.58</b> per child.
	ERCAB older people, fuel and housing advice and support	£114,000	Allocated for 24/25	Funding for three posts to continue throughout 24/25. Impact outlined of posts for 2023/24 in Table 1.
	ERC Tenants support fund	£50,000	Full spend	<b>36</b> tenants supported to sustain their tenancy through referrals made by a housing officer.
	Tenant support fund for Barrhead Housing Association	£30,000	Full Spend	Payments from <b>£100-£320</b> distributed to <b>53</b> households to cover either cost for carpets or direct hardship payments to residents.
Organisational recovery	VAER community intervention and support for vulnerable residents	£52,000	Full spend	VAER assisted HSCP with community intervention and support for vulnerable residents over Winter. <b>123</b> referrals received, <b>50</b> for which they coordinated winter interventions such as food shopping or wellbeing activities.
	Extension of HSCP wellbeing officer post for further 3 months	£14,500	£14,500 Carry forward to 24/25 for continued delivery	Post continued for the period of March-June 2024.

Wellbeing support for vulnerable individuals	Additional occupational therapist support for children over winter period	£45,000	£45,000 to be returned to HSCP	Unable to recruit
	Economic Development- Individual Placement Support Programme	£49,000	Full spend	Funding transferred to SAMH to deliver service from April 2024 to support people with mental health issues to access employment
	Education- Early Years Language & Social Communication	£64,000	£64,000 to be carried forward to 24/25 to continue work	Additional support to <b>40</b> children from 14 early learning centres to date
	ERC homelessness response	£100,000	Full spend	Alleviated pressures of a <b>194%</b> increase of nights spent in emergency bed and breakfast and <b>130%</b> increase in the number of placements made in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23.
	Family First intervention worker	£22,000	£22,000 to be carried forward to 24/25 to continue work	To extend the Family Intervention post to December 2024 ensuring more families access the support through this holistic service

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