

The background of the slide features the Falkirk Council Coat of Arms. It is a shield divided into four quarters. The top-left quarter shows a saltire (X-shaped cross) on a blue field. The top-right quarter shows a stag's head facing left on a blue field. The bottom-left quarter shows a sailing ship on a blue field. The bottom-right quarter shows a lion passant guardant on a blue field. Above the shield is a crown with four fleurs-de-lis. Below the shield is a ribbon with the motto 'A'NE FOR A'.

Agenda Item 6

Tackling Poverty in Falkirk – Income Maximisation Strategy

Falkirk Council

Title: Tackling Poverty in Falkirk – Income Maximisation Strategy

Meeting: Executive

Date: 11 April 2023

Submitted by: Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the various actions being taken to support those in poverty. These were reported to the Executive in June 2022 and to Council in December 2022. This paper provides Members with a longer-term strategy for income maximisation as requested by the Executive on the 21st June 2022.
- 1.2 The work in this report supports the Council Plan priority on promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive:
 - (1) Approve the Income Maximisation Strategy

3. Climate Change Implications

- 3.1 The recommended decisions do not impact the Council's climate change targets and obligations. Officers' assessment is that the policies and procedures detailed in this report will not lead to changes in service provision or the deployment of resources that would increase or decrease the emission of carbon.

4. Background

- 4.1 As inflation rises and costs of living increase, more households are experiencing poverty and poverty is worsened for those already experiencing it. In the 12 months to January 2023, the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 16.8% while gas rose by 129%¹.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costofliving/latestinsights>

- 4.2 Around one in seven adults (15%) said they had been worried about running out of food. When only adults with dependent children were considered, this increased to one in four (25%). Whilst the full cost of the gas price increase was not passed onto customers due to the Energy Price guarantee, 47% of adults who pay energy bills said it was very or somewhat difficult to afford them. The Energy Price Guarantee is set at £2,500 for a 'typical' amount of household energy use until April 2023.
- 4.3 Crisis (national charity for homeless people), predict that 300 000 households across Britain could become homeless in 2023, an increase of 32% since 2020².

5. Income Maximisation Strategy

- 5.1 An Income Maximisation Strategy is included in Appendix 1. The strategy was drafted following engagement with Council services and partner organisations. This included community groups, many of which provide food and other essentials to households struggling with costs. The strategy builds on Towards a Fairer Falkirk 2019-2024, further supporting our work to tackle poverty and reduce the stigma often associated with poverty. An update on our work to tackle poverty was provided in the Tackling Poverty report to Council in December 2022.
- 5.2 The strategy focuses on what more can be done within existing resources, by sharing information, developing tools and making better use of data to target support. This will help to make sure people get all the support they are entitled to. These actions will mainstream advice and support by providing information and tools that can be used by anyone, including frontline staff, community volunteers and the public.
- 5.3 Frontline staff and volunteers already support people who are struggling with their finances. With additional information, tools and training we can maximise the impact this support has on increasing household disposable income. This will help to make sure that specialists, such as Citizens Advice and Community Advice Services debt and benefits advisors, focus where their expertise is required and they add most value, for example, complex benefits forms and appeals.
- 5.4 The Income Maximisation Strategy details our proposed actions over the next two years, with a focus on:
- Improving knowledge among staff and those in the third sector who directly work with households and communities
 - Developing simple, easy to use tools and resources which support the delivery of advice and support and empower households to check their own eligibility for benefits and in-kind support

² <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/300-000-households-across-britain-could-be-homeless-next-year-if-government-does-not-urgently-change-course/>

- Using our wealth of data effectively to allow us to proactively identify and target support to households most in need
- Improving our communication to ensure it is timely, reaches the right audience and is clear and action focussed

5.5 A communications plan has been developed to support income maximisation by promoting benefits entitlement and uptake of in-kind support (Appendix 2). This plan will be continually developed to promote new initiatives as they arise.

5.6 We will report progress against these actions to members annually. Our current poverty strategy 'Towards a Fairer Falkirk' runs until 2024. The two-year timescale for this strategy therefore aligns with our poverty strategy allowing them to be replaced by a single strategy from 2025 onwards.

6. Additional Housing Staff

6.1 As a social landlord we must also support our tenants. In line with the Income Maximisation Strategy we will embed income maximisation into day-to-day practice throughout the housing service. To achieve this, we will increase staffing across the service by 10 FTE (full time equivalents). The funding for this was allocated as part of the Housing Revenue Account budget approved in February 2023.

6.2 The additional staff will be based within existing teams to increase staff capacity to help individuals and households in or at risk of poverty. The allocation of additional staff is:

- 6 x Housing Officers
- 1 x Housing Assistant
- 1 x Allocations Officer
- 1 x Accommodation Officer
- 1 x Technical Officer

6.3 The Housing Officer and Assistant posts increase capacity within Housing Operations to maximise support to tenants. The Technical Officer will respond to and investigate concerns of mould and damp. This will make sure that prompt remedial action is taken to reduce further damage and that fuel poverty is considered as part of their interaction with tenants. The Allocations and Accommodation Officers will increase capacity within Housing Needs to focus on customer needs, by providing personalised advice and assistance. This will help people secure the right accommodation for their needs, as well as maximising their income and minimising poverty.

6.4 All staff will receive training to:

- undertake financial health checks
- recognise fuel poverty and provide advice and assistance
- make sure tenants have access to the right information, tailored to their needs, at the right time
- refer to other teams and agencies for specialist support as required

- 6.5 The additional resources will support Housing to take a preventative approach and achieve the following outcomes
- increased household disposable income
 - reduced rent arrears
 - improved tenancy sustainability
 - reduced numbers of households presenting as homeless
- 6.6 As these additional posts are funded by the Housing Revenue Account budget they will support Falkirk Council housing tenants. This will free up capacity across other teams to support non-housing tenants, ensuring more support for all in our communities.

7. Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery Payments

- 7.1 In March 2022, Scottish Government provided Falkirk Council with £2.29m to assist with social and economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic. The funding was to support local economic recovery and reduce the cost of living impact on low-income households. The Executive approved proposals for the use of this funding in June 2022 and agreed that officers would agree the final distribution of funding.
- 7.2 The following table shows how we allocated the Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery funding and the expenditure at the end of February 2023.

	Households	Value	Bank Transaction Charges	Allocation	Spend (Feb 2023)
Direct Payments					
Covid Economic Recovery Payment	13,000	£75	£1,950	£976,950	£696,975
Business Grants					
Resilience Fund				£318,263	£72,716
Falkirk Low Carbon Energy Efficiency Fund				£318,263	£57,372
Digital Development Fund				£318,262	£36,360
Household Support Fund					
Contribution to Household Support Fund				£318,262	£318,262
Modern Apprentices (to support payments and household support fund)			£40,000	£40,000	£15,491
Total				£2,290,000	

- 7.3 By the 31 January 2023 the funding allocated to support the three funds for businesses has been used as follows:

- Energy Efficiency Fund £57,372 to 7 businesses
- Digital Development Grants £36,360 to 7 businesses
- Resilience Grants £72,716 to 11 businesses

- 7.4 Demand for the three business funds has been less than expected. From April 2023 UK Shared Prosperity funding is available to support these grant schemes. The Shared Prosperity Funding was not available when we agreed the original allocations. To maximise the financial benefit across the Falkirk Council area, we have reallocated £504k from the business grants to support the Household Support Fund to support more low-income households.
- 7.5 This leaves a further £284,341 to support business grants in February and March 2023. Should this not be fully used it will be reallocated to support other business support activities.
- 7.6 As of 1 March 2023, 9,287 low-income households have received a £75 Covid Economic Recovery payment from this funding. We have reached 74% of those eligible for this payment and have re-contacted those who have not yet applied. We will reallocate any unused funds to the Household Support Fund.
- 7.7 The allocation of £318,263 from this funding to the Household Support Fund has been fully used.

8. Household Support Fund

- 8.1 Since September 2022 the Household Support Fund has made 3,723 payments to low-income households supporting 4,336 adults and 3,009 children. The total cost of these payments is £661,240 (03 March 2023).
- 8.2 The total available budget for this round of the Household Support Fund is £758,263 including the £190k funding allocated from Covid funding to support people experiencing financial insecurity and the £250k from the Non-Profit Distributing Organisation Rebate.
- 8.3 Further funding was recently allocated to the Household Support Fund as follows
- £250k from the Housing Revenue Account (Housing Revenue Account and Council House Rents 2023/24 – 2027/28 report section 5.6.4)
 - £250k from reserves (Revenue Budget 2023-24 and Financial Strategy report section 5.13.6)
- 8.4 This additional funding, along with the reallocated funding mentioned in 7.4, means we have £1.004m to support a further round of the Household Support Fund over winter 2023/24.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 To inform our Income Maximisation Strategy we engaged with Council services and partner organisations, included community groups, across the Falkirk area. The actions in the plan build on the feedback from that engagement. Further engagement is planned as we develop tools and resources to support the mainstreaming of income maximisation.

10. Implications

Financial

- 10.1 There are no new financial implications arising from this report.
- 10.2 The additional staff will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account as highlighted within the Housing Revenue Account and Council House Rents 2023/24 – 2027/28 report approved by Council on 23rd February 2023.

Resources

- 10.3 As described in section 6 we plan to increase resources across our Housing Service by 10 FTE. We will work with colleagues in Human Resources to consider how we support the challenges arising from the implementation of budget savings across services by offering potential redeployment opportunities to these roles for affected employees.

Legal

- 10.4 There are no legal issues arising from this report.

Risk

- 10.5 The Council's risk register includes a risk that we fail to monitor, measure, manage, and mitigate the impacts of Poverty. The support proposed by this report will help mitigate this risk.

Equalities

- 10.6 There are no new equalities issues from this report. The Fairer Scotland duty has been considered during the development of these proposals which focus on maximising support for people in or at risk of poverty.
- 10.7 An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment was carried out for the Income Maximisation Strategy. This assessment showed that the strategy seeks to mitigate the impacts of poverty, consistent with our obligations under the Fairer Scotland duty. As those who experience poverty are often those with protected characteristics, the plan is likely to have a positive impact on those groups. Further information on the impact on protected characteristics groups is included within the strategy (Appendix 1).

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

10.8 There are no new environmental or sustainability issues from this report.

11. Conclusions

11.1 The Income Maximisation Strategy for sets out actions to mainstream income maximisation across Council service and the Community Planning Partnership. By providing information, tools and training to staff, volunteers and the public, we can help more people to access benefits, debt advice and non-financial in-kind support. In turn this will make sure that the specialist services add maximum value by supporting more complex benefits applications and appeals. These actions, alongside the other anti-poverty activities, included the previous report to Council, will increase disposable income across the Falkirk area, alleviating poverty and boosting the local economy.

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Date: 20 March 2023

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Income Maximisation Strategy

Appendix 2 Fairer Falkirk Campaign 2023

List of Background Papers:

[Tackling Poverty in Falkirk – Additional Support to Low-income Households](#) Executive
21 June 2022

[Tackling Poverty in Falkirk – Additional Support to Low-income Households](#) Falkirk
Council 14 December 2022

Falkirk Income Maximisation Strategy

Introduction

With the increasing cost of living, income maximisation is an essential element of mainstream service delivery which will help to reduce the impact of poverty across the Council area. One of our key Council Plan priorities is promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities¹. Key to this is making sure that people understand what benefits and in-kind support they are entitled to and providing them with targeted advice and support to help them maximise that entitlement². In-kind support is non-financial benefits that reduce household costs and therefore increase disposable income, for example free bus travel, free school meals and free period products.

Across Scotland, the impact of recent increases in living costs caused by inflationary pressure and global factors such as increases in energy prices are being painfully felt by households. The most recent data shows that one in four children in the Falkirk area are living in poverty, and whilst national policy initiatives, particularly the Scottish Child Payment, will have an impact it is too early to evaluate this robustly.

Some groups in our communities are more likely to experience poverty than others. Women, for example, are more likely to be living in poverty than men and have less income to weather the economic upheaval we are currently facing. With that in mind, it is vital that we co-ordinate our efforts to boost household incomes.

This document sets out our strategy for improving take up of benefits and in-kind support from April 2023 to March 2025.

Current service provision

Services across the Council, the wider Community Planning Partnership and throughout the third sector support households across our communities in a variety of ways. Services provide support with housing, social care, education, employment, and money amongst others. However, when interacting with people, more and more often the topic of money is raised, and greater numbers of people are regularly experiencing acute crisis.

What work is already ongoing in income maximisation?

The benefits and support landscape in Scotland is complex, and often people are unsure of what support is available to them. Many of our services and our partners in the third sector already undertake invaluable work in supporting people in this regard, and it is important that we build on this.

The table below illustrates examples of some of the work which is already undertaken in this regard.

¹ [The Falkirk Council Plan](#)

² [Towards a Fairer Falkirk 2019-2024](#)

Figure 1 – High level summary of income maximisation work undertaken by services and the third sector.

Who	What
Advice and Support Hubs	<p>Providing support to claim and processing claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments, Education Benefits.</p> <p>Undertaking benefit calculations, providing advice and support and signposting people to other help they might be entitled to.</p>
Community Advice Service	<p>Our Community Advice Service support people to claim the benefits and in-kind support they are entitled to, and help them address debt and manage their money.</p> <p>This includes undertaking comprehensive benefit checks with people, supporting them with claims and appealing adverse decisions. It also includes referring people for other support which could help them in the short term, such as fuel vouchers and Household Support Fund payments.</p>
Citizen's Advice Bureau	<p>The three Bureaux operating in Falkirk play a vital role in supporting people with their money. As well as supporting people with managing their money and understanding what they are entitled to, they also provide support with making claims and representation in appeals.</p>
Housing	<p>Housing Officers focus on tenancy sustainability across council housing. They support people to pay their rent, agreeing affordable payment plans with tenants and referring them to further support services when needed.</p> <p>Housing Needs work across services, including housing, anti-social behaviour, and social care, to prevent homelessness. The team work directly with clients to assess their housing needs and assist with applications. They make referrals to other support</p>

	services where needed, including community advice and debt advice.
Employment and Training Unit	<p>The ETU work with people to help them into employment through training, upskilling, and helping overcome potential barriers to employment (such as childcare).</p> <p>In partnership with other services, they also work with parents to support them with their finances and can illustrate how work could make them better off. They also help ensure that they are getting all of the benefits and in-kind support they are entitled to.</p>
Community Learning and Development	Provide person-centred services and assist individuals and families in developing critical literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. They also identify parents who are struggling financially through schools and signpost them to services.

One of the foundations of our strategy is a recognition that we all have a role to play in ensuring that each household gets all the support they are entitled to. Although specialist advice services play a distinct role in providing support with complex issues, it is fundamental that everyone who interacts with people in their role has an understanding of poverty and the issues it causes as well as knowledge of what financial and in-kind support is available, who is eligible for that support and how they can access it. This means building knowledge and skills amongst staff, making simple and easy to use tools and resources available, and promoting awareness and understanding of key support services and referral routes.

Opportunities for learning, development and improvement

In developing this strategy, consultation with the services above was undertaken. This identified areas of good practice, opportunities for development, and areas where improvements could be made. These are summarised in the table below.

Figure 2 – Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the delivery of support to maximise household income.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and skill base within specialist services internally and within the third sector. • Proactive work undertaken with people to help them understand their entitlement and claim what they are due. • Direct internal support schemes, such as Household Support Fund, are a tool which help promote engagement with services. • Growing relationships between teams and increased awareness of respective roles. • People inherently trust those in advice and advocacy roles. • Opportunities to refer to other services like welfare benefits and debt advice are taken. • Proactive work being undertaken in schools to increase people's skills aiding their development. • Several services are already out in the community with staff recognised as friendly and helpful, building trust with community members. • In some areas, coordination with external services is already happening, e.g., East Hub, Grangemouth CAB, and Kersiebank • Committed third sector actively supporting people with greater need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge generally of different support services and their respective roles. • Lack of awareness of resources available to staff, such as the support map and benefits directory, with some staff resorting to search engines to find information. • Information sharing can be piecemeal, and multiple channels are used to communicate. In many cases, staff share information indirectly through private channels. • Lack of quick and easy tools to identify what support a household may be eligible for • Duplication of work in some areas, with similar checks being carried out by different services. • Lack of a "360 view" of customers with same information captured many times which can be tiring for customers. • Lack of understanding of some benefits, e.g., Universal Credit, in some frontline roles. • Lack of awareness of some grants, e.g., Community Care Grant. • Some web content is not in plain and easily understandable English, with use of jargon and complex language prevalent in some areas. • There is no one go to place with all the information on support available. • Opportunities are missed to signpost to support services, e.g., during housing sign up. • There can be delays in information on new support reaching frontline staff through traditional communication channels.
Opportunities	Threats

- Our services are data rich, and there is untapped information which could enable greater targeting of support.
- More can be made of strong personal relationships between non specialist services and vulnerable people.
- There is good anecdotal evidence of people finding information about entitlement through social media, which could be a highly effective communication tool.
- Systems are already available which could help track gains in benefit and in-kind support effectively.
- Services could be taken into communities more and made available where most needed.
- Existing guidance and content for staff could be effectively indexed and developed further.
- Services can work with schools to improve financial education and knowledge among young people.
- Steps can be taken to ensure specialist services have the opportunity to focus on those where they can add most value.
- Web content could be improved and made more visual and interactive.
- Staff have a wide variety of knowledge and can help inform other staff members if peer support networks are opened up.
- Changing culture amongst staff through improving understanding and awareness of the root causes of poverty and low income, helping remove stigma from claiming support and benefits and maximising income.
- Our website has a lot of good information, but it could be more effectively organised.
- People are already going into homes and engaging with households; we just need to utilise the opportunity this presents more effectively.
- Welfare benefits and debt advice support is already there, as are community and third sector services; more staff need to know about what they do and how to direct people to them.

- Complex and evolving benefits landscape.
- Lack of time with people to talk about their finances in some frontline roles.
- Stigma people feel in “opening up” to those who could help them about their finances.
- Negative perception of services in some areas.
- Reluctance among older people to provide essential information.
- Engagement often happens too late when households are already at the point of crisis.
- Increasing presentations from those whose benefits and support have already been maximised.
- Lack of confidence amongst staff to discuss benefits as they can be confusing and overwhelming.
- Awareness of referral routes to different services is a challenge and poses a barrier to engagement. If a staff member or member of the public has a question about a service, they often don't know who to turn to.
- Prevalent fear of engaging with the council, especially around rent arrears.
- Lack of coordination between services on this work, and displacement of responsibility.
- Lack of internet access and digital skills
- Need to deliver savings reducing capacity within teams.

Our vision for income maximisation in Falkirk

We will ensure that the right support is readily available to anyone who needs it to claim all of the financial and in-kind support they are entitled to. We will use our data as a resource to proactively identify opportunities to maximise household income, particularly for those in our tackling child poverty priority groups.

To empower communities, households, and those who serve them, we will ensure that easy to use tools and resources are readily available to help ensure that each household reaches their maximum entitlement to all benefits and in-kind support.

How we will target our support

We know from previous research that different groups of people are impacted in different ways by poverty. In producing this strategy, we carried out an Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA). As indicated in the EPIA, those sharing certain protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are particularly adversely impacted.

Women, older people, those with disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups and those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community are disproportionately more likely to experience poverty. Therefore, it is important that the action we take under this strategy is proactive in terms of reaching people in those groups and caters to their different needs.

Living in a household experiencing poverty as a child puts the child at significant disadvantage in life. We have clear obligations to those in our priority family groups whom we know are particularly impacted by poverty and socio economic disadvantage. These family groups are:

- Lone parent families
- Ethnic minority families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Families with a young mother (under 25)
- Families with a child under 1 year old
- Larger families (3+ children)
- Care experienced young people

We have a significant opportunity to target advice and support towards these groups to ensure they are receiving all the benefits and in-kind support they are entitled to. As an example, the Scottish Child Payment is £25 per child per week and can make a material difference to household income. Scottish Child Payments may change our child poverty priority family groups going forward once the positive impact of these payments has been fully understood.

Objectives and success measures

Our actions to deliver our vision focus on four areas.

1. Improving knowledge among staff and those in the third sector who directly work with households and communities.
2. Developing simple, easy to use tools and resources which support the delivery of easy to understand advice and support and empower households to check their own eligibility for benefits and in-kind support.
3. Using our wealth of data effectively as a resource to allow us to proactively identify and target support to households most in need of it.
4. Improving our communication to ensure it is timely, reaches the right audience and is clear and action focussed.

The table below summarises our objectives, key actions and success measures in each area.

Objective	Actions and milestones	Success measures	Who will deliver
Knowledge			
Improve staff and third sector awareness of the root causes of poverty and low income.	<p>Delivery of monthly 'Think Poverty' awareness sessions to new and existing staff as approved by elected members in December 2022.</p> <p>Offer these sessions to third sector organisations and community groups.</p>	<p>Number of people attending sessions.</p> <p>First session held in March 2023, with ongoing monthly sessions thereafter.</p> <p>Deliver twelve sessions in year one – six for new joiners, and six for existing staff.</p> <p>Achieve attendance of 240 existing staff in year one, and 75% of new joiners.</p> <p>75% of those attending providing feedback that it increases their understanding of poverty and how they can help people in their role.</p> <p>Sessions added to the induction programme for new staff, and available monthly to all staff thereafter.</p>	Partnership between Fairer Falkirk team and Community Advice Services.

<p>Ensure up to date and easy to understand training on benefits and in-kind support is available to all staff via the OLLE e-learning platform.</p>	<p>Complete a stock take of OLLE courses currently available related to income maximisation.</p> <p>Identify gaps in information and knowledge currently imparted and revise current offering as necessary.</p> <p>Re-launch offering and ensure it is a fundamental part of regular refresher training and part of induction for new staff.</p>	<p>Review of current offering undertaken by end of December 2023.</p> <p>Revised content developed and new content launched by end June 2024.</p> <p>Added to new start induction and made part of regular refresher training for frontline staff as soon as possible thereafter.</p> <p>Number of people completing training.</p>	<p>Welfare Benefits team, in partnership with Organisational Learning and Development.</p>
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Objective	Activities and milestones	Success measures	
Developing tools and resources			
Gain a clearer understanding of how aware households and our communities are of our services and the information we have available to them.	<p>Carry out survey focussing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of income maximisation services. • Awareness of information available. • Awareness of how to get support. <p>What information, resources and support households need from us in this regard.</p>	<p>Survey concluded by end of June 2023.</p> <p>Results analysed by end of September 2023, which will inform development of information resources and communications plan.</p>	Fairer Falkirk.
Develop a “quick check” tool for staff and households to identify potential gaps in entitlement to benefits and in-kind support.	<p>Identify and appraise options for off the shelf purchase or in house created tool to quickly identify potential gaps in entitlement.</p> <p>Appraise potential cost of buying off the shelf option (should one exist) against in-house build and determine best course of action. Work with in-house development team (if best option) to develop tool.</p>	<p>Options appraisal concluded by end November 2023.</p> <p>If in-house tool is best option, develop tool and launch by end May 2024.</p>	Fairer Falkirk, working together with Innovation and Digital and Revenues and Benefits (Community Advice Service and Advice and Support Hubs).

<p>Ensure benefits and money information available publicly on our website is easy to navigate, logically set out and simple and easy to understand.</p>	<p>Undertake a review of information on benefits and support currently available on our website.</p> <p>As part of review, identify “best practice” examples across the wider public sector.</p> <p>In conjunction with outcomes from survey as well as the review, work with our web team to develop more effective content.</p>	<p>Review completed by end of September 2023.</p> <p>Revised web content published by end of December 2023.</p>	<p>Fairer Falkirk, working together with Innovation and Digital and Revenues and Benefits (Community Advice Service and Advice and Support Hubs).</p>
<p>Ensure information resources available to staff are accessible, clear, easy to understand and comprehensive.</p>	<p>Undertake a review of information on benefits and support currently available to staff. This includes intranet content, and ensuring awareness of external content staff use regularly and rely on (such as the Benefits Directory, Policy in Practice and other external resources).</p> <p>Identify best practice examples of internal staff resource “directories” or information banks.</p> <p>Work with our web team to develop well indexed, accessible</p>	<p>Review completed by end of March 2024.</p> <p>Revised resources and content published by end of June 2024.</p>	<p>Fairer Falkirk, working together with Innovation and Digital and Revenues and Benefits (Community Advice Service and Advice and Support Hubs).</p>

	<p>and clear content with appropriate external links.</p> <p>Ensure content is kept under regular review and undertake consistent promotion of resources.</p>		
<p>Improve non digital access to information about benefits and in-kind support for those facing barriers to digital participation.</p>	<p>Work with colleagues in Libraries to develop awareness of benefits and in-kind support, and online resources available to support people in this regard. Ensure those attending libraries are supported to access these resources.</p> <p>Develop suitable resources for display in libraries and other public spaces and keep these under regular review.</p>	<p>Carry out briefing sessions with all Libraries staff by end of September 2023.</p> <p>Develop and distribute resources by end of September 2023.</p>	<p>Fairer Falkirk, working with Libraries and Communications team.</p>

Objective	Activities and milestones	Success measures	
Using data more effectively			
Use data analysis tools to interrogate information we hold and proactively identify those in our priority family groups, and those with protected characteristics, who are worst impacted by poverty.	Analyse data and identify those in priority groups/with protected characteristics in greatest need of advice and support.	Initial scoping exercise completed by end April 2023.	Fairer Falkirk in partnership with Revenues and Benefits (Community Advice Service and Advice and Support Hubs).
Use this data to proactively target advice and support to those households in the most efficient and effective manner.	Design a targeted approach to promote engagement with advice services to carry out a comprehensive financial health check, using Household Support Fund (HSF) as a vehicle to drive that engagement.	Initial target group(s) identified, and pilot exercise undertaken with c100 - 200 households by end May 2023.	
		Evaluation of results by end June 2023.	
		Identification of further group(s) and further exercises undertaken on an ongoing basis across the remainder of the year, with further evaluation by end March 2024.	

<p>Establish the rate of take-up of in-kind support in the area, gain an understanding of perception of this support and revise actions.</p>	<p>Scoping exercise to identify available data on take-up and numbers of those eligible for support.</p> <p>Gauge awareness of support and any potential barriers to take-up by carrying out a survey exercise.</p> <p>Revise action to maximise take up of support based on outcomes of scoping exercise and feedback.</p>	<p>Initial scoping exercise carried out by end October 2023.</p> <p>Survey carried out by end December 2024.</p> <p>Revision of this strategy with specific items around take up of in-kind support by end March 2024.</p>	<p>Fairer Falkirk.</p>
<p>Quantify the impact of advice and support provision on household income.</p>	<p>Review current practice in front line services and identify best practice.</p> <p>Work with services to develop and implement appropriate measures for recording household financial and non-financial benefit gains.</p>	<p>Review concluded by end September 2023.</p> <p>Appropriate system identified and implemented by end March 2024.</p>	<p>Advice and Support Hubs and Fairer Falkirk.</p>

Objective	Activities and milestones	Success measures	
Improving our communication			
Continue to develop Fairer Falkirk communications strategy with a focus on income maximisation.	<p>Keep current strategy under review, and proactively identify opportunities to promote benefits and in-kind support, with a particular focus around events and different times of year.</p> <p>Use innovative and progressive communication strategies, such as video interviews with staff members and customer testimonials to make content more relatable.</p>	<p>Monthly meetings between Fairer Falkirk team and Communications team.</p> <p>Review current communications strategy by end August 2023, and evaluate impact of first six month period.</p>	Fairer Falkirk, with input from other services as required.
Improve internal information sharing among frontline staff by establishing a Benefits and Support Yammer community.	<p>Create vision for group and identify content moderator(s).</p> <p>Post information on support and services available and facilitate networking and information sharing between staff in different frontline teams and areas.</p>	<p>Launch community by end June 2023.</p> <p>Grow membership to 500+ frontline staff by end September 2023.</p>	Fairer Falkirk, with input from other services as required.

Resources

This strategy identifies that there are significant opportunities to build on existing service delivery and improve the take up of benefits and in-kind support and sets out a plan for achieving this. As identified above, the strategy focusses on developing knowledge and information resources, making better use of existing data and improving our co-ordination of action and communication.

As a result, there are no significant resource implications of this strategy beyond the use of existing staff time. The strategy simply focusses on improving the utility of existing resources, such as the wealth of front facing staff, community volunteers and data that is already available to us.

Monitoring and review arrangements

We need to recognise the dynamic and changing landscape in which these services are operating. As such, this strategy is intended to be fluid and subject to adaptation and change as and when required.

To ensure appropriate oversight and accountability, we will update members on progress after year one of this strategy, using red/amber/green to show progress and highlight issues. Between times, the strategy will be kept under review and new actions will be added if required.

Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

As indicated above, a full Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA) has been carried out in the development of this strategy. The EPIA has been published and is available to view at [<INSERT LINK WHEN AVAILABLE>](#).

In this instance, the EPIA has been carried out in the context of developing a strategy which we anticipate will benefit many of those in our communities who are already experiencing poverty or at increased risk of experiencing poverty. The EPIA assisted us in identifying specific groups who are most likely to be impacted, and to ensure that those groups are a key focus within our actions.

We considered the Fairer Scotland duty as we developed this strategy. The actions are expected to have a positive impact on people in or at risk of socio-economic disadvantage.

Fairer Falkirk Communications Plan 2023

Background

“People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living acceptable in the society in which they live.”

Fairer Falkirk sets out the ambition for Falkirk Council and the Community Planning Partnership to understand and address the impact of poverty on individuals, families and communities in our area.

Falkirk Council’s four themes:

1. Fairer Money - Income maximisation and financial capability
2. Fairer Access - making access to services and opportunities joined up, relevant and specific to an individual’s needs
3. Fairer Culture - an inclusive and stigma-free Falkirk
4. Fairer Childhood - Reducing the negative impact of poverty on children and reducing child poverty in future

[Towards a Fairer Falkirk 2019-2024](#)

ScotGov’s five ambitions:

1. A Fairer Scotland For All
2. Ending Child Poverty
3. A Strong Start For All Young People
4. Fairer Working Lives
5. A Thriving Third Age

[Fairer Scotland Action Plan - gov.scot](#)
[Policies & strategies - The Council Plan 2022 - 2027](#)

Goal

The goal of this campaign is to connect people who are living in – or at risk of – poverty with the Falkirk Council services that help alleviate poverty in the area, in line with the Fairer Falkirk strategic goals of Fairer Money, Fairer Access, Fairer Culture and Fairer Childhood.

Objectives

Objective	How we'll do it	Success Measure
Increase use of Benefits Calculator	Regular organic promotion through social media, timely paid advertising.	Web Traffic Increase year-on-year
Increase use of Budgeting Tool web page	Regular organic promotion through social media, timely paid advertising.	Web Traffic Increase year-on-year
Increase uptake of free period products	Regular organic promotion through social media, timely paid advertising.	Increased uptake of products
Increase uptake of U22s bus travel	Regular organic promotion through social media, timely paid advertising.	More YoungScot applications
Increase uptake of GoCard	Marketing campaign and regular organic promotion through social media, timely paid advertising.	More GoCard applications
Increase use of Cost of Living Support web page	Regular organic promotion through social media, timely paid advertising.	Web Traffic Increase year-on-year
Increase YOY footfall in libraries	Promote events in libraries, promote libraries as a warm space.	Number of visits Number of members
Improve understanding of what poverty is	Features, thought leadership, explainer content	Consultations

Produce regular story-driven features to define poverty and break the stigma	Identify stories in our organisation and customer base	N/A
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Audiences - Who are we talking to?

Our target audiences are people in the area who may be susceptible to poverty. This is based on child poverty priorities and Scottish Government priorities.

1. Lone parents (majority of whom are women)
2. Large families (3+ children)
3. Parents with young children <12 months
4. Parents aged under 25
5. Ethnic minority households
6. Households with disabilities
7. Care experienced individuals and families
8. Elderly (communication via relatives)
9. Students

Scheduling

We've produced a schedule of content. It's designed to be timely and relevant, directing users to services that could benefit them.

Messaging

Generic

- We want to help people in need
- Almost a quarter of children in Falkirk area are living in poverty
- Our services are designed with you in mind

Fairer Money

- Use our benefits calculator and see what you're entitled to
- Our debt advisors can help you with debt and money worries
- Use our budgeting tool to help plan your finances
- Get free period products delivered to your door

Fairer Access

- Our Falkirk map shows you exactly where to access our services
- You can access our services in a way that is easy and convenient for you

- Our financial services are free to access, confidential and impartial

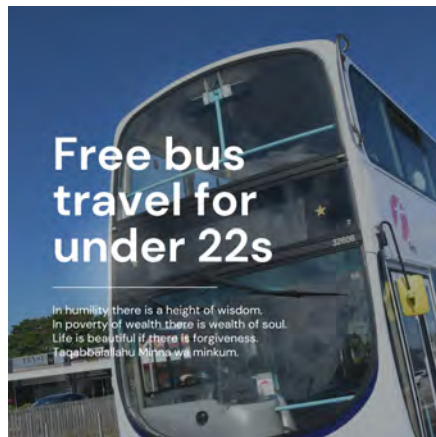
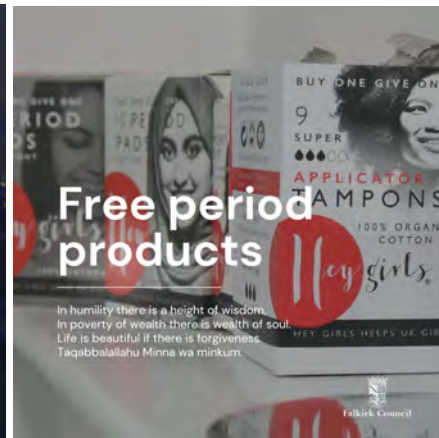
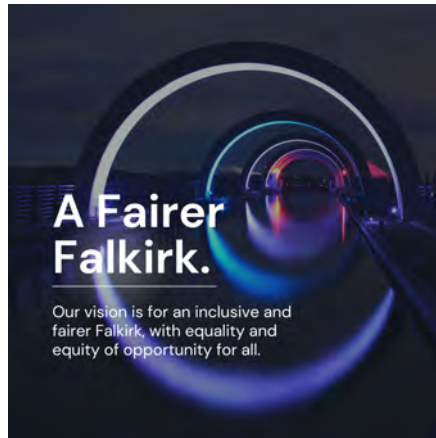
Fairer Culture

- Breaking the stigma and defining poverty in Falkirk
- Poverty affects us all, and your family and friends could be affected
- Poverty is not a lifestyle choice
- Challenging the culture of poverty
- Poverty looks different for different people

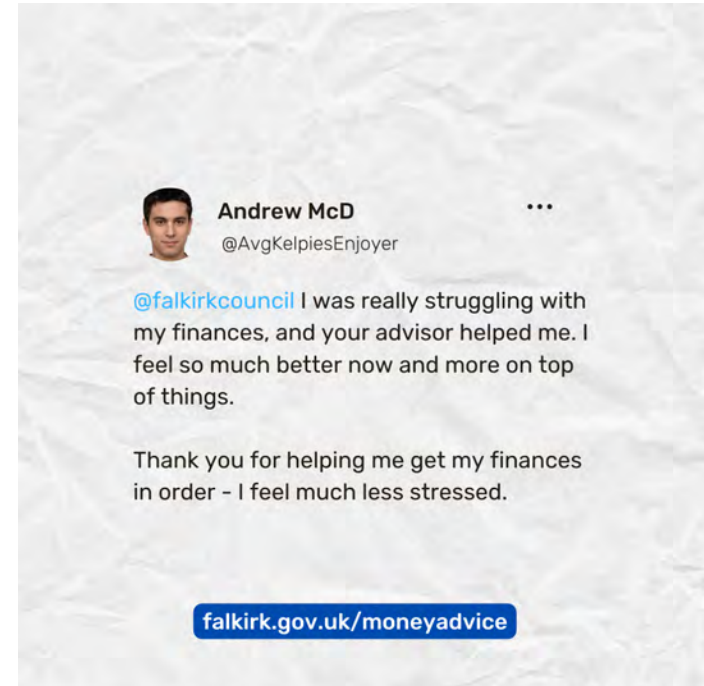
Fairer Childhood

- Get a Go Card and get free swimming access for two kids
- There's something for all at our libraries, and they're completely free
- Under 22s can get free bus travel with a Young Scot card
- Free online resources for learning and fun
- Help is available for the cost of the school

Creative I



Creative II



Budget

- £100-200pm FB advertising

Channels

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Instagram Stories
- Use of video where relevant, e.g. telling stories
- Mailing List

Formats

- Email
- Interviews
- Case studies and testimonials
- Organic posts
- Paid posts
- Multi-image galleries