

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

12 October 2023

Report by Director of Environment

UPDATE ON THE LOCAL AUTHORITY COVID ECONOMIC RECOVERY FUND

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to update members in the relation to the progress of the Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery Fund (LACER) in East Renfrewshire which was awarded by the Scottish Government in February 2022.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. The Cabinet is asked to note and approve the update provided on the delivery and spend associated with the LACER Fund.

**BACKGROUND**

3. On 21 February 2022, the Scottish Government announced a new £80 million Covid Economic Recovery Fund aimed at supporting businesses and communities to help Scotland as it moved to a new phase in the Coronavirus pandemic. Funds were to be allocated via a weighted formula based on the number of towns and population in a local authority area and deprivation indices.

4. Following approval of the distribution methodology by COSLA Leaders, East Renfrewshire Council was awarded £1.469m to be used to support covid economic recovery activity. The funds require to be fully committed by the end of March 2024.

5. The guidance to the fund advised that local interventions must meet one or more of the following principles of spend, but innovative approaches that addressed multiple principles were encouraged:

- Interventions that supported local economic recovery and contributed to businesses being able to move from surviving the period of trading restrictions towards recovery, growth, adaptation and building resilience.
- Projects that could rebuild consumer confidence and stimulate demand and economic activity in their specific contexts.
- Support the low-income households that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, to become more economically active.

6. On 18 August 2022 Cabinet agreed a three-tiered approach to this fund, to provide an appropriate balance of support for the local economy as well as low-income households:

- **Support to businesses who were linked to low-income households.** This focused on prioritising support to businesses in sectors with lower-paid staff. This aimed to reduce any adverse COVID impacts to employees and, where relevant, support towards increased fair work practices (i.e. Real Living Wage accreditation).
- **Support to businesses who were most adversely affected by the pandemic.** This supported the wider economic recovery across East Renfrewshire. This support included direct support to businesses (including compliance with COVID requirements) as well as initiatives to stimulate economic activity (including the 'Shop Local' campaign).
- **Support to low-income households who were most adversely affected by the pandemic.** This focused on providing direct (i.e. shopping vouchers, food) and indirect (i.e. advice around income maximisation and fuel poverty) support to residents. This was targeted at those households most in need as identified in the research findings and by ongoing engagement through the Child Poverty Oversight Group.

### Call for Proposals

7. A call for proposals was issued on 25 May 2022 to internal and external stakeholders with a working group set up with officers from Economic Development and Business Operations & Partnerships to assess proposals against the fund's objectives. The allocation of funding was informed by the evidence gathered through the recent consultation and community research findings around the impact of COVID in East Renfrewshire. In delivering support, we utilised ongoing multi-agency partnership working including the Covid Humanitarian Support Group, the Child Poverty Oversight Group and the Local Employability Partnership.

### **REPORT**

8. There was broad engagement with a range of internal and external stakeholders to build on the research and consultation on the impact of Covid in East Renfrewshire and to develop a series of projects. These projects, listed in Annex A of this report, provided a mix of outcomes across the 3 criteria specified. In total 19 projects were approved by Cabinet on 18 August 2022. Of the £1,469,000 awarded, £1,271,774 was spent by 31 March 2023 and £174,073 is committed to be spent by the end of March 2024. There has been some reallocation of underspend within the programme of circa £20k to achieve full spend of the fund.

### **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

9. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Projects were funded through the LACER Fund with activity being supported until the end of March 2024.

10. The Council must comply with the conditions of grant, as set out in the Scottish Government guidelines.

### **CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

11. Consultation took place with a range of key stakeholders within the community and across Council services.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS**

12. There are staffing implications as the Council have recruited a number of temporary posts using LACER funds. This means there will be employees whose temporary contract will be brought to an end. In some situations employees may return to a substantive post or be placed on the redeployment register. There are no property, legal, IT, UK Subsidy Control, equalities, sustainability and climate change implications associated with this report.

13. The programme has funded a wide range of projects that have supported local residents and businesses. The intention of this funding was to support work to mitigate the widening inequalities arising from the pandemic and support local economic recovery. Where appropriate and possible the results and learnings from the projects will be incorporated into mainstream operations and future strategy development that support a more inclusive, fairer and sustainable local economy.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

14. This funding has provided much needed support to our local businesses and residents who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis.

15. Appendix 1 provides progress against those projects which were supported via the LACER Fund.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

16. The Cabinet is asked to note and approve the update provided on the delivery and spend associated with the LACER Fund.

Director of Environment

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September 2023

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## Annex A: Update on the progress of LACER funded projects

Approved Budget: £1,469,000

Project Title	Description	Funds Awarded	Spend	Outcome of Delivery to Date
Fuel Poverty Officer	Cabinet on 7 April 2022 agreed to this funding to extend this post to 31 March 2023. The Officer works with households who are struggling to pay their utility costs and maintain supply. The post focuses on accessing energy grants from various sources, liaising with energy providers to ensure continuous supply, and liaison with other specialist service, like Home Energy Scotland, for energy efficiency measures.	£35,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanitarian Funding was used to support this post up until end of March 2023 with LACER funding being used until end of March 2024.</li> <li>• An officer was recruited into the MART team covering a period of 6 months over the financial year 2023/2024.</li> <li>• The Officer has generated £20,200 in savings for residents since starting in post on 15/05/2023.</li> </ul>
Covid Compliance Officer	Cabinet on 7 April 2022 agreed to fund this post to 31 March 2023.	£40,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underspend of £11,788</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet approved funding for this post for one year only (2022/23).</li> <li>• The person that was in the post left and although the vacancy was advertised it was not filled.</li> <li>• Underspend £11,788 to be reallocated</li> </ul>

Barrhead Housing Association (BHA) Tenant Economic Recovery Support	BHA provided support to tenants including Community Chest/Hardship fund providing grants of up to £250 to pay fees for clubs, classes or memberships; Education such as evening classes, courses or extra tuition; Skills development related activities and clothing for a specific event or need e.g., a job interview, winter coat, shoes.	£42,400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<p>The fund received from LACER was split into 3 categories:</p> <p><b>Customer Support Fund</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £24,000 was distributed to 129 BHA Customers who are in low income households.</li> </ul> <p><b>Christmas Presents/ Vouchers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 383 Christmas presents purchased.</li> </ul> <p><b>Back 2 School Bank Partnership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project has partnered with Back to School Bank East Renfrewshire and to date has made 17 individual referrals for either school uniform or warm clothing for children.</li> </ul>
East Renfrewshire Council Housing Service	Support to low-income households who have been most adversely affected by the pandemic and still continue to be due to the cost of living crisis.	£127,200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 140 referrals</li> <li>• 103 tenants receiving award – this ranged from £500-£2,800 dependant on the households needs.</li> </ul>
Winter Clothing Support	This project provided a cash payment to school pupils who are in low-income households but do not meet the eligibility for the Family	£65,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LACER funding was combined with Covid Reserve Funding to provide</li> </ul>

	Bridging Payments that were provided by Scottish Government. Target was to provide support to 500 children through LACER and other funding			<p>support for 632 children in total in December 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LACER proportion benefitted 250 children who qualified for a school clothing grant of £260 each.</li> </ul>
Adult Learning/Family First/Education Project	This project was aimed at increasing the wellbeing and skills of parents living in poverty to support their child's learning at home and in nursery leading to increased confidence which will enable them to move towards employment.	£54,860	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A total of 23 families received support via this project.</li> </ul>
'Scotland Loves Local' Gift Card - Low Income Household Payments	Provision of funding to low income households to assist in mitigating poverty. Eligible households were those in receipt of Council Tax Reductions in bands A to G (c. 4,532 households). They received a gift card for £105 to be spent with local businesses in East Renfrewshire.	£511,291	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To date 204 East Renfrewshire businesses registered for the scheme</li> <li>To date £339,128.61 has been spent locally</li> <li>4,469 low-income households received the £105 card</li> </ul>
Discretionary School Vouchers	This project provided financial support to low-income families across East Renfrewshire. This project provided vouchers to school pupils who are in low-income households or who found themselves in short-term financial need.	£10,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18 households of low-income families were assisted with ASDA vouchers issued in schools.</li> </ul>

Additional Staff for Accounts Payable/Compliance	There was a significant volume of work required to process hardship payments in tight timescales with large datasets, in a secure financial control environment to protect against fraud and ensure best use of resources. The funding was used to recruit additional staff for the Accounts Payable and Compliance team.	£58,400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Accounts Payable staff commenced employment in September 2022 with 1 Accounts Payable Staff member continuing after March 2023.</li> </ul>
Low Income Household Holistic Support	<p>This funding 'topped up' the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) budget; extended the current Humanitarian Discretionary Fund administered by Money Advice and Rights Team (MART); and provided a new fuel poverty fund.</p> <p>Scottish Welfare Fund - £30,000 for Grants &amp; 2 x Grade 5 posts (c. £60,000) = £90,000</p> <p>MART = £60,000 for Grants</p> <p>Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) - Fuel – £60,000 for Grants &amp; 1 post (£40,000) = £100,000</p>	£250,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<p>The funding was distributed to 3 interventions:</p> <p><b>MART Discretionary Fund</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This intervention was awarded £60,000 via LACER however activity was funded via the Humanitarian need Fund</li> <li>• The £60,000 from LACER has been carried into 2023/2024. To date the programme has achieved:</li> <li>• The fund provided assistance to 77 families between 1st April 2023 and 18th September 2023.</li> </ul>



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The households assisted contained 108 adults and 54 children.</li> </ul> <p><b>East Renfrewshire CAB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A fuel adviser was recruited</li> <li>245 clients received advice with regards to energy bills</li> <li>47 clients received advice on benefits.</li> </ul> <p>A combined client financial gain of £173,407.96</p> <p><b>Scottish Welfare Fund</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The additional resource from LACER have supported 500 Crisis Grant applications from April to July 2023.</li> </ul>
Grow Local Supplier Development	Resources through Business Gateway East Renfrewshire to develop the Grow Local supplier development scheme which supports local SMEs to improve their tendering potential with the public sector.	£10,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underspend of £1,629</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultant employed, database of local suppliers collated, stakeholder engagement undertaken, process developed.</li> <li>Consultant work complete. Project now being progressed further by Economic Development and Procurement teams.</li> <li>After first round of engagement 13 businesses</li> </ul>

				<p>expressed interest in becoming suppliers with the public sector. Further engagement is planned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses are being supported with guidance and resources to help make them tender and bid ready.</li> <li>• Underspend of £1,629 to be reallocated.</li> </ul>
Dunterlie Foodshare 2022-2023	This funding enabled the continuation and development of the project over 18 months and allowed the group to respond to the growing cost of living crisis and its effects on local people and families including providing food vouchers alongside existing food provision.	£24,925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunterlie Foodshare managed to give out 3,100 bags of food to low- income households.</li> <li>• 23 vulnerable families have received £30 vouchers in the total value of £690.</li> </ul>
Thornliebank Foodshare 2022-2023	This funding enabled the continuation and development of the project over 18 months and allowed the group to respond to the growing cost of living crisis and its effects on local people and families including providing food vouchers alongside existing food provision.	£24,925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 59 families were supported</li> <li>• Thornliebank Foodshare provider, estimates that they were able to distribute some 28,000+ meal portions</li> </ul>
Prevention Officer Trading Standards	Trading Standards Enforcement with Prevention project to tackle illegitimate traders and support reputable traders to recover from the impact of Covid and ensure consumers can employ reputable traders with confidence.	£58,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention officer appointed in November 2022.</li> <li>• Patrol Van hired until March 2024. (Funded via SCOTSS)</li> <li>• Van signage completed and project officially launched and thousands of “No cold</li> </ul>

				<p>calling” stickers widely distributed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scam prevention posters distributed in local Community.</li> <li>• Started engaging with on-site traders and providing business advice.</li> <li>• Started promoting and encouraging new trusted traders.</li> <li>• Contacts established with Police Scotland, Community Safety and Trading Standards Scotland.</li> <li>• Arrangements in place with Police Scotland to escalate suspicious activity.</li> </ul>
Economic Recovery Graduate Interns	Recruitment of graduate interns from the East Renfrewshire area to work on projects that supported economic recovery. Graduates had at least 1 barrier to employment and worked on projects including: ‘Grow Local’ supplier development scheme which supported local SMEs to improve their tendering potential with the public sector and assist in the developing a community wealth building approach to economic development in East Renfrewshire.	£32,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 local graduate interns recruited started January 2023</li> <li>• Both graduates working on projects that support local businesses/suppliers and the local economy.</li> </ul>

Greenlaw Growth	Greenlaw Works opened to support both start up and growing business. There was a need to ensure that those who are based in this flexible workspace had on hand a wide range of support to assist them to succeed. The funding was used to provide immediate support through Business Gateway and Economic Development to make Greenlaw Works a place of knowledge, capacity building and growth. Key partners were also brought in to support this wide and varied business base.	£40,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underspent of £2,912</li> </ul>	<p>Business Gateway are continuously working across businesses located at Greenlaw Works. They have supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 business networking events took place to bring Greenlaw based businesses together</li> <li>• 50 meetings were held with businesses to promote Business Gateway services to tenants</li> <li>• 8 businesses received direct advice and support from Business Gateway, including access to grant finance.</li> <li>• Underspend of £4,712 to be reallocated.</li> </ul>
Social Enterprise Development and Network	This project helped the East Renfrewshire social enterprise network to develop and grow through support and guidance from Business Gateway and Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire (VAER).	£15,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	<p>The project took three main phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attendance by 6 local social entrepreneurs onto the Social Enterprise Leadership programme at University of West of Scotland, all attendees each received £250 grant.</li> <li>• Mentoring support for one enterprise to develop their presence in East Renfrewshire.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of a Social Enterprise Network in partnership with VAER.</li> <li>• In total 7 enterprises have been supported under this project.</li> <li>• Over spend of £1,800 reallocated from Greenlaw Growth above.</li> </ul>
Development of Green Business Initiatives	This programme supported several businesses who had innovative ideas and concepts to change the way their business operated and delivered projects which reduce carbon, increase efficiency, improve processes to reduce waste or other similar initiatives to meet the green agenda and the net zero target.	£25,000	Underspend of £611	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 new green business initiatives were developed and 5 businesses received funding of £2000 towards expert help and consultancy.</li> <li>• 5 businesses were able to access expert help from the University of Strathclyde including energy audits, surveys, and technical information on specific technologies to assist their business.</li> <li>• Underspend of £611 to be reallocated.</li> </ul>
Black & Minority Ethnic (BAME) Business Network	This project focused on economic community building within the local BAME business community; created a BAME Business	£35,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full funds committed</li> </ul>	This is a two-phase project:

	Network and delivered the first annual event; engaged with the BAME community to identify businesses needing support and businesses able to offer peer support and developed a suite of materials in required languages and appropriate business related topics.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Food Festival took place on 12 September 2023.</li> <li>• This event allowed local businesses to connect, network and promote their products.</li> <li>• The creation of a network of businesses from the BAME community with support from Business Gateway East Renfrewshire</li> </ul>
Real Living Wage (RLW)	This project was to promote the benefits of offering the Real Living Wage to local business and provide a direct payment for one year to encourage take up of the RLW in the area, including grants to support transition.	£9,999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underspend of £4,413</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 marketing posts on Business Gateway and East Renfrewshire Council social media pages took place.</li> <li>• Real Living Wage Accreditation has been promoted at various business networking events.</li> <li>• One Accreditation delivered to one local company.</li> <li>• Underspend of £4,413 to be reallocated.</li> </ul>
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>£1,469,000</b>		