

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee
<b>DATE</b>	23 November 2022
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Anti-Poverty and Inequality Update
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CUS/22/250
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Andy MacDonald
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Derek McGowan
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Paul Tytler
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee with an overview of current activity in respect of tackling and alleviating poverty and inequality across Aberdeen, with regard to child poverty, fuel poverty, food, in-work poverty and income and the current cost of living pressures.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the activities and progress described in the report.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 There are a wide range of activities aiming to alleviate and tackle poverty and the inequality that arises from poverty across the city. While many of these are delivered by Council services and by organisations supported by the Council to deliver relevant services, there are a great many community and third sector organisations working to support people affected by poverty. Many of these organisations are successful in securing funding from other sources to support their work in communities and across cities.
- 3.2 Many interventions cut across areas of work, delivering a number of outcomes and these are described further below.
- 3.3 The Council has allocated funding to tackle poverty and support communities, this includes £1.6m for the Fairer Aberdeen Fund, which is distributed through participatory budgeting, and £743,468 in community grant funding to community groups. In addition, we continue to auto-award Free School Meals (FSM) where we have information relating to benefits. This has seen 825 additional children and young people receive the benefit where their parent/carer had not already applied for it. These 825 cases were also then passported (by entitlement to FSM) to receive the Scottish Child Payment Bridging Payments. The new combined Free School Meals and Clothing

Grant application process provides customers with access to both benefits from a single application and checks eligibility through a series of questions in advance of the customer submitting the application. This makes the process easier for customers and reduces some of the workload for processing staff.

3.4 Aberdeen City Council has been allocated funding by the Scottish Government to offset the costs of the school day. The aim is to remove all charges levied on children and young people in primary and secondary schools for participation in core curriculum subjects and schools are no longer permitted to charge for materials or resources required to access or participate in core curricular areas. The funding allocated to date is:

- £203K was allocated for 21/22 – a further £50,750 was allocated as part of 21/22 = £253,750
- £201,250 was allocated for 22/23 – and a further £92,000 is to be allocated as part of 22/23 = £293,250 (The £92,000 allocation is indicative, conditional on the Scottish Government budget for 23/24, and will be paid as part of that year's grant - which is unknown at this time)

3.5 The scope of work to reduce the cost of the school day includes:

- Classroom-based activity within the 8 core curriculum areas in the broad general education in primary and secondary school
- Activity associated with preparation for SQA qualifications in the senior phase. This would include (but is not limited to):
  - All ingredients and materials required for home economics
  - All art materials
  - All materials required for design, manufacture and technology subjects
  - Scientific calculators for secondary school pupils
  - Theatre trips associated with SQA drama qualifications
  - The purchase of recorders where this is required for a class-based learning experience in primary schools
  - Provision of specialist equipment to support classroom learning during themed weeks (e.g. participation in STEM week).

3.6 In addition to this allocated funding, the Council has recently agreed funding of £1.1m to mitigate the cost of living crisis through community pantries and food provision, fuel and energy saving support, employability and provision of winter clothing. These funds are being disbursed and are already providing meaningful help to households across the city.

3.7 The establishment of the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee, and the appointment of external advisers to it, will ensure that the Committee will be able to consider relevant and appropriate issues and identify relevant actions.

## Context

3.8 The Council Delivery Plan – Aberdeen – A place where all people can prosper – sets out the following policy statement (no.10):

- Reduce fuel poverty across our most deprived communities through combined heat and power schemes including the Energy from Waste Plant and supporting community owned energy solutions

The Delivery Plan further describes links with the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), which describes the following stretch outcome (no. 1):

- No one in Aberdeen will go without food due to poverty by 2026

This stretch outcome identifies key drivers, which in turn inform the development of improvement outcomes. The key drivers identified in the LOIP are:

- Mitigating the causes of immediate and acute poverty.
- Ensure those experiencing in-work poverty have access to all appropriate benefits.
- Supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people, families and groups.
- Poverty affecting those with protected characteristics and in specific communities.

The policy statement and key drivers above provide the strategic context for much development work alongside the delivery of services to tackle aspects of poverty, which are now described below.

## Child Poverty

3.9 The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 (the Act) sets out steps required to be taken by the Scottish Government, Local Authorities and Health Boards to tackle child poverty.

The Act identifies targets to be achieved by 2030: to reduce a) relative poverty b) absolute poverty c) combined low income and material deprivation and d) persistent poverty. It also requires Local Authorities and Local Health Boards to jointly prepare an annual Child Poverty Action Report describing measures contributing to meeting the targets. This Report is then published and submitted to Scottish Ministers. The Annual Report was submitted to Operational Delivery Committee on 31 August 2022 (CUS/22/149) along with a six-monthly update (CUS/22/150) and these papers will in future be brought to the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee.

3.10 The Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022 – 2026 Best Start, Bright Futures identifies three drivers of child poverty, and the

annual report and action plan sets out progress against the relevant LOIP outcomes. The drivers are:

- Work and Earnings
- Social Security
- Household Costs

In addition, Best Start, Bright Futures identifies six priority groups most at risk of child poverty and these are:

- lone parent families
- minority ethnic families
- families with a disabled adult or child
- families with a younger mother (under 25)
- families with a child under 1 year
- larger families (3+ children)

3.11 Work is underway to refresh the Child Poverty Action Plan for 2023-26, and this will be considered at the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee in January 2023. Under the Act this is a joint plan by the Council and NHS Grampian, however we are working with community planning partners, with the input from the external advisers to the Committee, to ensure this is a comprehensive plan.

3.12 The Council has developed a Framework for Equity aligned to the LOIP and stretch outcomes for children and young people, and in terms of early intervention highlights the following:

- The expansion of childcare and early years provision and a focus on early years interventions for children and their parents helps address inequalities
- Our schools develop poverty aware policies and practices which reduce financial pressure on families and ensure that all children and young people are fully included in all aspects of school life

#### In-work Poverty and income

3.13 A number of initiatives impact on addressing in-work poverty, including work on employability to support people into work, secure additional hours and better paid work and to move from zero hours contracts.

3.14 The Financial Inclusion Team supports people to ensure benefit uptake and people, including those in work, are claiming all their entitlements. The team led a LOIP improvement project to improve benefit uptake and the final project report is included at Appendix 1.

3.15 In 2020/21, the team supported 2423 people, securing £3.457m in financial gains, supporting £5.721m in debt management. They carried out 1469 benefit checks, winning 81% of appeals against decisions on the award of benefits.

- 3.16 A further LOIP improvement project aims to 'increase employer sign up to the Real Living Wage by 5% year on year to 2023 to achieve Real Living Wage City Status by 2026'.
- 3.17 The Real Living Wage is an independently calculated rate based on the cost of living and is paid voluntarily by employers. The rate is currently £9.90 per hour and is calculated annually by the Resolution Foundation according to an analysis of the wage that employees need to earn in order to afford a 'basket of goods' required for a decent standard of living. This basket includes housing, childcare, transport and heating costs.
- 3.18 A report (COM/22/218) on the development of an action plan to support the implementation of the Real Living Wage was presented to the City Growth and Resources Committee on 21 September 2022. The Committee agreed the recommendations in the report.
- 3.19 The latest project update report indicates that 74 employers headquartered in the city are now real Living Wage accredited – a 68% increase since the project started and a 32% increase since January 2022. Over 1600 workers have received an uplift in wages since the establishment of the real Living Wage movement in the city. Further accreditations are in the pipeline.
- 3.20 The new real Living Wage rate of £10.90 was announced on 22 September 2022. The announcement of the rate was brought forward from November to September this year in the hope that the increase would reach workers' pockets sooner, although any employer who was accredited before this date has until 15 May 2023 to implement it.
- 3.21 The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) data is due to be published in Q4 2022 and will give us updated figures on the percentage of the working population in Aberdeen being paid at least the real Living Wage.
- 3.22 Work is ongoing to engage with business organisations and collectives to discuss how they could help promote the project amongst their members. Development of a formal action plan (a recommendation in the committee report) is ongoing ahead of a planned application to join the Making Living Wage Places scheme in Q3/4 2022.
- 3.23 [ABZ Works](#) delivers a considerable range of support, supporting people at all stages towards employment and improving their employment situation. This includes support for people being made redundant.
- 3.24 An update on the extensive range of services delivered was considered by City Growth and Resources Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 (COM/22/120). A description of the range of initiatives is at Appendix 2.

#### Fuel Poverty

- 3.25 Energy Action Scotland identifies the main causes of fuel poverty as:
- Poor energy efficiency of the dwelling

- Low disposable household income
- High price of domestic fuel
- How energy is used in the home

- 3.26 The current Capital programme of insulation work to Council properties has a budgeted spend of £9.6m on various energy efficiency measures including insulation and heating system replacement, and we continue to offer heat and power to residents across the City, with a new heat network under construction in Torry.
- 3.27 The Council provides funding to SCARF to provide home energy advice to residents of Aberdeen. In addition, the City Growth and Resources Committee on 31 August 2022 approved a contribution through the Cost of Living paper (CUS/22/151) towards the provision of fuel vouchers and further insulation measures.

### Food

- 3.28 The supply of food available to foodbanks is changing. Individual donations are reducing as people are affected by increased costs of living and are less able to afford food bank food donations. Fareshare is a national scheme supported by the Scottish Government to supply surplus food from the food industry for redistribution. Aberdeen City Council currently supports this scheme through the provision of £67k from the Fairer Aberdeen Fund for staffing and administration.
- 3.29 The City Growth and Resources Committee on 31 August 2022 approved a contribution through the Cost of Living paper (CUS/22/151) to support the Fareshare Network in Aberdeen and Food Poverty Action Aberdeen in purchasing suitable food supplies for distribution across their members. These include many community and third sector organisations distributing food parcels, as well as the operation of larger foodbanks. In addition, funding was made available to support the further development and expansion of Community Pantries, providing more people with access to more dignified choice and selection of food, aiming to reduce dependence on emergency food provision.

### Fairer Aberdeen Fund

- 3.30 The Fairer Aberdeen Fund (£1.6m) is allocated by Aberdeen City Council to tackle poverty and deprivation. The programme is aligned with the themes from the Local Outcome Improvement Plan contributing mainly to LOIP Stretch Outcome 1: No one will suffer due to poverty by 2026, as well as supporting adults and young people.
- 3.31 The Fund is allocated by a deliberative participatory budgeting approach, with a Board made up of representatives from priority areas, the Civic Forum, Elected Members, NHS Grampian, Police Scotland and ACVO (Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations). The majority of the Board are community representatives who bring their understanding of the needs of their communities and ensure that the community voice is heard. They are also involved in

monitoring and evaluating the Fairer Aberdeen programme to ensure it is achieving outcomes and best value.

- 3.32 The Fund supports initiatives and services in priority areas, as well as vulnerable groups across the city. In 2021-22, 35,610 people were involved with or benefitted from the 38 funded initiatives within the main programme. 643 volunteers contributed 114,280 hours of volunteering with a value of £1.7m.
- 3.33 During 2021-22, 567 people took part in employability programmes and 236 people moved into work. 3032 people received money and income maximisation advice, with 1059 of them receiving a total financial gain of £5,941,710 - the equivalent of £5,610 per person. 495 parents and families with complex needs were supported, and 355 people accessed mental health counselling provision provided locally. 557 tonnes of free food were distributed, the equivalent of 1.6m meals.
- 3.34 A Community Support Fund is also available to support community engagement and empowerment and an Employment Support Fund addresses financial barriers for people getting back into work. The Board also delivers small grant based Participatory Budgeting events in at-risk communities to provide opportunities for wider influence and community involvement in decision making.

#### Funded Community Projects

- 3.35 Funding of £743,468 has been awarded to Aberdeen Lads Club, Fersands Community Project and Family Centre, Middlefield Community Project, Printfield Community Project, St Machar Parent Support Project, Station House Media Unit and Workers Educational Association (WEA) to provide Community Learning and Development in priority neighbourhoods. The funded projects contribute to the LOIP Stretch Outcome 1: No one will suffer due to poverty by 2026, by mitigating the causes of poverty and supporting vulnerable people, families, and groups in priority communities, and to the Community Learning and Development Plan 2021-24.
- 3.36 These projects work with vulnerable and disadvantaged people and families affected by poverty, including those most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Services delivered include Childcare and Early Years, After School Clubs, holiday activities and playschemes, Family Support, Adult Learning, Youth Work, Community Capacity Building and access to free food and food pantries. They provide support and advice on fuel poverty, welfare reform, benefits, financial inclusion, employment, health and wellbeing, isolation and social exclusion.
- 3.37 During 2021-22, nearly 3000 people participated and over 150 volunteers contributed 33,000 volunteer hours. The projects undertake surveys among their participants to inform their quarterly and annual performance reports, and these indicated 431 young people participated in diversionary activities, 661 young people felt they were listened to and could make a difference in decision making, and 489 reported they felt more confident, resilient, and optimistic for the future. 1473 young people received free food during the school

holidays. 386 adults took part in adult learning activities, and 788 in classes and groups. 108 adult learning opportunities and 3526 hours of classes and groups were provided. 171 people took part in training opportunities, 286 environmental education opportunities were provided and 1792 people felt more positive about the area they live in.

- 3.38 Following Covid restrictions all funded projects are now back working at full capacity. Many accessed additional funding to support those who have been most disadvantaged by the pandemic, including food, fuel vouchers, digital inclusion, and providing one to one contact and group activities to address mental health issues and isolation.

#### Funding

- 3.39 The Hardship Support Programme was allocated up to £407k through the Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery (LACER) fund, approved by City Growth and Resources Committee on 21 June 2022 (External Funding – COM/22/111). This funding is being distributed to community and third sector organisations and across services to tackle hardship issues including provision of meals, winter clothing and a wide range of other supports to vulnerable people
- 3.40 The Scottish Welfare Fund supports people through the provision of Crisis Grants and Community Care grants, with a Scottish Government allocation of £1.063m in 2022/23. Given the level of demand on the fund, a further £300k was allocated by Operational Delivery Committee on 31 August 2022 (CUS/22/151) as part of Supporting People with the Cost of Living. This enables the SWF to continue supporting medium priority applications.
- 3.41 Clothing grants support people with the cost of school clothing and shoes, providing £120 for primary and £150 for secondary pupils. To date in 2022/23, the Council has awarded 4096 clothing grants, with 2631 primary and 1465 secondary pupil grants.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, the initiatives described support the Council in complying with both the Fairer Scotland Duty and the Public Sector Equality Duty as laid down by the Equality Act 2010.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	Risk of not fully using the opportunity to support those in most need	Communication plan that includes a wide range of partners across: communities, H&SCP, Education	L	Y
<b>Compliance</b>	Risk of not meeting statutory requirements.	The poverty and inequality support described provides evidence that statutory requirements are met and are documented in statutory plans such as the Child Poverty Action Plan and Equalities Outcome Mainstreaming Report.	L	Y
<b>Operational</b>	Staff and volunteer capacity  Impact of winter flu bug and Covid 19	Monitor uptake carefully to determine any remedial action required.  Apply guidance to settings as required	L	Y
<b>Financial</b>	No risks identified		L	Y
<b>Reputational</b>	Risk of being considered as not helping to mitigate the increase in cost of living costs being experienced across the city.	The provision of cost of living and other support described is an important mitigation for households, along with £1.1m financial support already committed to communities, and ongoing work such as free school meals, school clothing grants, heat and power	L	Y

		network, and financial advice.		
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risks identified		L	Y

## 8. OUTCOMES

<u><a href="#">COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022-2023</a></u>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<p><b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b></p> <p><u><a href="#">Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</a></u></p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce fuel poverty across our most deprived communities through combined heat and power schemes including the Energy from Waste Plant and supporting community owned energy solutions</li> </ul>
<u><a href="#">Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</a></u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	<p>The activities described within this report impact on the Prosperous Economy section of the LOIP, stretch outcome no 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No one in Aberdeen will go without food due to poverty by 2026</li> </ul>
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The activities within this report support the delivery of Children &amp; Young People Stretch Outcomes 4 and 5 in the LOIP:</p> <p>4. 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026.</p> <p>5. 90% of Children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026</p>
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	N/A
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	

Council Delivery Plan – Aberdeen – A place where all people can prosper	The actions within this report support statement no 10: Reduce fuel poverty across our most deprived communities through combined heat and power schemes including the Energy from Waste Plant and supporting community owned energy solutions
Regional Economic Strategy Securing the future of the North East Economy	The actions within this report support actions under Inclusive Economic Growth: Deliver £2.2m ESF Employability Pipeline Project to increase economic activity through training and work experience placement

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	Full impact assessment not required
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	N/A

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Operational Delivery Committee on 31 August 2022 (CUS/22/149)
- 10.2 Operational Delivery Committee 31 August 2022 (CUS/22/150)
- 10.3 City Growth and Resources Committee 21 September 2022 (COM/22/218)
- 10.4 City Growth and Resources Committee 21 June 2022 (COM/22/111)
- 10.5 City Growth and Resources Committee 21 June 2022 (COM/22/120)

## 11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – LOIP Improvement Project Benefit Uptake Project End Report
- 11.2 Appendix 2 - ABZWorks Employability Programmes and Services

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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# Community Planning Aberdeen

<b>Progress Report</b>	Project End Report: We are aiming to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City by 10% to support people claim the benefits they're entitled to.
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Derek McGowan
<b>Report Author</b>	Angela Kazmierczak
<b>Date of Report</b>	22 September 2022
<b>Governance Group</b>	CPA Management Group – 26 October 2022

<b>Purpose of the Report</b>
This report presents the results of the LOIP Improvement Project Aim to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City by 10% to support people claim the benefits they're entitled to and seeks approval to end project has the aim has been achieved.

<b>Summary of Key Information</b>
<p><b>1. BACKGROUND</b></p> <p>1.1 A new stretch outcome was introduced into the LOIP 'No one will suffer due to poverty by 2026' to communicate the Partnership's commitment to reduce inequalities in the city and to mitigate the causes of immediate and acute poverty through projects which will ensure all people across the city have access to food, fuel, shelter, and finance.</p> <p>1.2 The pandemic has pushed many people into poverty partly due to reduced income. This has not been evenly spread, with certain groups more likely to experience these negative effects, most often those who were already lowest paid and closest to poverty.</p> <p>1.3 Figures from the Scottish Household Survey showed an already high level of financial insecurity in Aberdeen City with 11.1% in 2019 reporting that they "Don't manage very well and have some financial difficulties" or "Are in deep financial trouble". This is compared to 8.8% in Scotland and an increase from 9% in 2018.</p> <p>1.4 Ensuring that household income is maximised through the uptake of unclaimed benefits is a key aspect to supporting households to come out of poverty and improve their financial security. There continues to be barriers which can mean people do not claim benefits they are entitled to. These</p>

include the stigma of claiming, people being unaware of what they are entitled to, onerous applications processes, and those living in rural Scotland facing geographical barriers. This project sought to implement changes to mitigate these barriers.

## **2. IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AIM**

2.1 Against this background, on 20 April 2022 the CPA Board approved the [project charter](#) for the initiation of an improvement project which aimed to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City by 10% to support people claim the benefits they're entitled to.

2.2 Ensuring that household income is maximised through the uptake of unclaimed benefits is a key aspect to supporting households to come out of poverty and improve their financial security. There continues to be barriers which can mean people do not claim the benefits they are entitled to. These include the stigma of claiming, people being unaware of what they are entitled to, onerous applications processes, and those living in rural Scotland facing geographical barriers.

2.3 There is a lack of accurate data on estimating eligibility and take-up, meaning the full extent of the problem is not known. The Government figures released in February 2020 based on DWP/HMRC data from 2017/2018 show an estimated £16 billion of benefits go unclaimed in the UK.

## **3. WHAT CHANGES DID WE MAKE?**

3.1 Several changes were tested throughout the project and are listed below.

### **1. Online benefit calculator**

An online benefit calculator was purchased to enable individuals to identify the benefits they are entitled to, through a 24/7 accessible digital tool. The online calculator aimed to:

- Help our residents understand their entitlements with our own branded benefits calculator
- Designed to be self-service freeing up staff resources though with the option of an adviser led assistance for those more vulnerable.
- Hundreds of help pages available to assist individuals to understand their own entitlement
- Signpost users on where and how to claim
- Management Reports will show how many people have accessed the tool along with the additional benefits identified.

However, having the tool, was only part of the answer, people need to be aware of it and actively using it for it to increase the uptake. The tool was highlighted through working with communities, newsletters, and social media campaigns to increase awareness of the tool.

## 2. Families Benefit Booklet

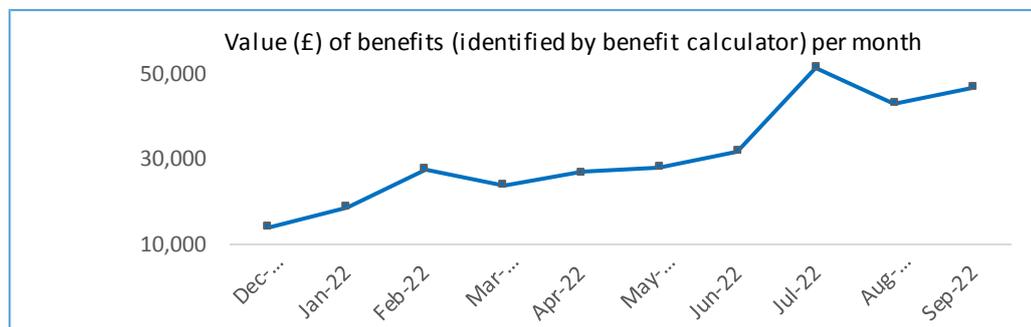
A booklet was created pulling together all benefits available for families to increase uptake in child aged benefits. The booklet targeted families and provided guidance on how to claim. This was sent out via Educations Group call messaging system along with promoting this via each School's social media pages and added to the Councils Website.

## 3. Targeted benefit take-up campaign

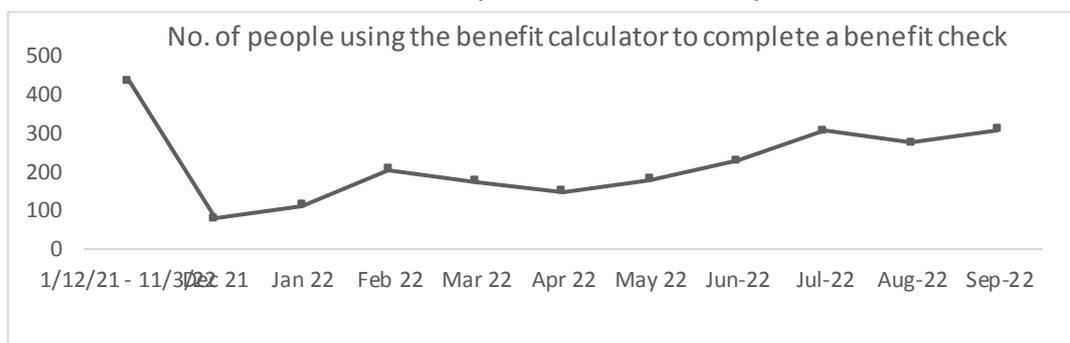
Identifying existing data from ACC sources that could be used to support identify people eligible for certain benefits to enable direct communication/auto award to be undertaken to test if this increased uptake. For testing, project used existing data from Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction data, to manually check those that would have an entitlement to Pension Credits. All households identified were then contacted by the Financial Inclusion Team.

## 4. HAVE OUR CHANGES RESULTED IN IMPROVEMENT?

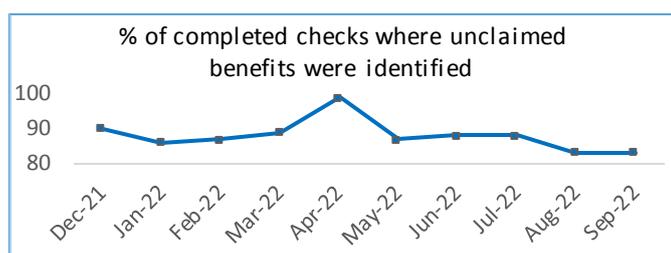
4.1 The project has surpassed its aim of a 10% increase with an 81% increase in uptake of unclaimed benefits on average per week between 12 March 2022 to 30 Sept 2022 compared with 1 Dec 2021 to 11 March 2022 through the online benefit calculator. This data shows improvement which has been sustained over time.



4.2 The chart below details the number of people completing the calculator per month. Showing that since 1 Dec 2021, 2,000 people have completed the benefit calculator, with 1,901 people having unclaimed benefits identified, to a total value of £282,452.53 p/w as of end of September 2022.



4.3 On average 88% of people completing the calculator since Dec 2021 have had unclaimed benefits identified (as detailed in chart below)



#### Targeted Benefit Campaign Using Data to Identify Eligible Households

4.4 Using Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction data from 10 February 2022, we identified 410 household who qualified for Pension Credits, who should be entitled to £172,218.42 weekly/ £895,357.84 annually. All have been contacted directly by letter. People contacted have feedback that without the contact they wouldn't have been aware of entitlement and wouldn't have made the claim. This system is now built in with eligible households now contacted as business as usual.

4.5 When doing targeted benefit take up campaigns, we initially called households, however many would not engage as concerned that it was a scam. From this learning, the team adapted the test and now write to the household first instead of calling them to prevent any concerns about being a scam. This letter provides the household with the information on how to claim the benefit they're entitled to as well as where to access support to complete the claim

#### Benefit Promotional Campaign

4.6 From the pension credit target take up campaign held in June, from 1 social media post on 1 June, this resulted in 1 week, 28 people complete the check, resulting in £79,569.32 new financial gains for 22 households, compared with 29 people completing the pension credit check in the whole of May. This shows that the direct social media campaign for specific benefit showed improvement.

#### Families Support Booklet

4.7 The families support booklet was issued to all school age families in March 2022. The evaluation data shows the really positive impact of the booklet with 90% of people who responded to the support for families booklet found it useful and 25% went on to submit a claim. Feedback also reported that families wanted the information provided on a regular basis and not as a one off and that it needed to be easy to access on an ongoing basis.

### 5. HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

5.1 The data shows that the improvement has been sustained each month as of October 2022. To ensure this continues to be sustained the changes tested

have been adopted as business as usual and will continue as they have proved successful in maximising the income of household in Aberdeen. The multi-agency project team will continue to meet ensuring that existing changes continue, and further changes identified.

5.2 For the benefit calculator, it is recognised that further opportunities to raise awareness of the calculator and enabling people to access and complete the calculator individually, but also where support is required to complete this with partner organisations, family, friends etc providing support. In line with this, a Community Planning Aberdeen campaign as proposed by the Board on 23 September 2023 is being arranged and will promote the calculator across all partners, local press, community groups, etc.

5.3 As detailed in section 7 below, given the confidence in the changes, the project will now scale up the changes tested to other benefits and target audiences at appropriate times via direct communication, auto award where possible and also through social media, newsletters, community groups etc. A dashboard is being developed using the Free School Meals/School Clothing Grant data to help identify those eligible for Education Maintenance Allowance and not claiming to allow a targeted benefit uptake to increase numbers.

5.4 Reflecting on the feedback from the families booklet, the team have developed a communication plan to ensure that at various points throughout the year families are communicated with in relation to available benefits. Also, from the learning from the targeted communication using available data, the team will use available data to target Educational Benefits that ACC administer with a view to auto award where possible.

## **6. HOW WILL WE MONITOR THESE IMPROVEMENTS?**

6.1 Benefit take up data is reported on monthly basis, and should it be agreed to end the project is ended; the data recorded will continue to be reported to the Anti-Poverty Group/Senior Management Team reporting, as well as reported on the Improvement Programme Dashboard to ensure that performance continues. Scale up improvements will be reported via the improvement programme dashboard.

## **7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALE UP AND SPREAD**

7.1 The project focused on specific benefits. The project recognised the potential for the changes tested as part of this project to be scaled up for testing with a broader range of benefits. The effectiveness of each of the change ideas as shown by the outcomes achieved through our initial testing with specific benefits, it is clear that there are further opportunities to scale these changes up and apply them to further benefits.

7.2 To progress this, the team will work with partners to develop information sharing protocols where required, to share data required to be able to identify and make

direct contact, and where possible, auto award, for other benefits. For example, we have submitted a re-use application to DWP to be able to use UC, Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction data to identify unclaimed benefits on a larger scale. The outcomes and the impact of the changes tested to date will also be shared with partners who are also awarding benefits in order to make direct communication or auto award where possible. The next benefits to use this data process to auto award will be Educational Benefits.

7.3 The learning from this project may also be of interest to other Outcome Improvement Groups, in particular projects 1.2 and 1.5. The ethos of good information sharing; joined up working; will likely resound across all improvement groups, particularly in light of the cost-of-living crisis and the circumstances facing many households and importance of maximising income. From the successful tests from this project.

7.4 Benefit calculator will be used to complete the financial assessment of people presenting as homeless as per improvement aim 1.5.

### **Recommendations for Action**

It is recommended that the CPA Management Group:

- i) Agree to recommend to the CPA Board on 30 November 2022 that testing is concluded and that this Improvement Project is brought to an end on the basis that the project aim has been achieved and the changes tested will continue with business as usual and the Anti-poverty group will continue to monitor data.
- ii) Note that the dataset for the overall aim will continue to be reported via the Improvement Programme dashboard to ensure progress is monitored.
- iii) Note that the project team will continue to scale up and spread the change ideas as described in section 7 with a view that a further increase in the uptake of unclaimed benefits is achieved and reported via the Improvement programme dashboard as per recommendation (ii).
- iv) Note that a CPA benefit uptake campaign will start in November 2022 to further raise awareness of the online benefit calculator, as well as all available benefits.

### **Opportunities and Risks**

Scaling up to other benefits - individuals may not engage with the information and applying for the benefits identified in same way the benefits tested. A potential risk is access to real time data on overall unclaimed benefits in Aberdeen City and to evidence impact of the changes tested.

### **Consultation**

Anti-Poverty Outcome Improvement Group

### **Background Papers**

The following papers were used in the preparation of this report.

- LOIP
- Project Charter – Unclaimed Benefits

#### Contact details:

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ACC Financial Inclusion Team Leader

## Appendix 2

### Detailed Information About ABZWorks Employability Programmes and Services

City Growth's ABZWorks employability team provides a variety of services and support to people and organisations across Aberdeen. A team of employability keyworkers provides a broad range of employability and broader holistic support through ABZWorks to individuals seeking employability support across all programmes. Some individuals will require intensive and long-term support stretching over years, while others require relatively short interventions and flourish once they have taken the first steps towards employment.

The team works closely with departments across the authority (particularly Education, Youth Social Work, Housing, Community Learning and Development, Healthy Minds, Financial Inclusion Team, Refugee Support Team, Libraries, Creative Learning, and Communities) and partner agencies including DWP, Skills Development Scotland, NESCol, and Developing the Young Workforce North East, health services, as well as third and private sector employability organisations. Keyworkers are meeting and engaging with participants from various locations and settings across the city. In partnership with the DWP Work Coaches, keyworkers offer weekly employability support from within the Job Centre Plus Office. Keyworkers are leading additional community outreach activities by offering drop-in sessions and meetings at Skills Development Scotland offices, within secondary schools, local libraries and from Community Hubs, such as the Tillydrone Community Campus and the Torry Community Hub.

Commissioned services enhance the offer for participants with provision available across all stages of the Employability Pipeline, a framework of five stages from Stage 1, where a person is very far from being work ready and may benefit from confidence building activities and barrier removal, right through to Stage 5 where someone has secured employment but might benefit from aftercare and in-work support.

The commissioned services cover a wide range of provision targeted at different groups, examples include: targeted provision for groups such as care experienced young people, people with criminal convictions, young people with additional needs, parents; activities promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, encouraging people out of their homes and instead engaging in individual or group work; digital training; sector based courses aligned with industries showing demand for staff including care, hospitality, construction and transit (HGV).

Combined keyworker support and commissioned services provide a broad offer to employability programme participants, however as each individual works to develop their own, tailored Action Plan, there is also opportunity to identify specific training or interventions that will benefit them based on their own aspirations.

The ABZWorks team provided advice and support to Early Intervention and Community Empowerment colleagues allocated £90,000 by Council on 10 March 2021 to create a targeted learning package for those whose employment opportunities had been hardest hit by Covid-19. Onward referral routes and opportunities have been highlighted, the activities provided via the £90,000 allocation are promoted to

ABZWorks participants and via ABZWorks social media channels, and the team continues working with Community Learning and Development colleagues to ensure individuals can access a pipeline of employability support to continue their progression towards employment or other positive destination.

### Socio-Economic Rescue Plan

The team played a significant role in the development and delivery of the Socio-Economic Recovery Plan, particularly within the People theme. Key employability outputs include:

- Delivery of Positive Destination Planning Sessions to support young people at risk of leaving school without a positive destination – now business as usual;
- Development of the ABZWorks one-stop employability shop website and social media channels – now business as usual;
- Ongoing workforce and employability schemes;
- A partnership promotional campaign for learning opportunities in the city;
- Support to encourage workers to move into the care sector – ongoing;
- Administration and ongoing delivery of the Kickstart Internship programme,
- Aberdeen City Council hosted 83 Kickstart internships across the organisation, and supported businesses across the city to secure 220 starts.
- One of the key 'soft' outcomes of the Rescue Plan was strengthened partnerships and closer working across various agencies and groups across the city and broader City Region.

### Connecting Scotland

This three-phase initiative was set up in response to coronavirus to help get every citizen in Scotland online, with a focus on the most isolated and vulnerable. The programme worked with organisations to support service users get online by providing digital devices, internet access and basic digital skills training.

Connecting Scotland was delivered in three phases: Phase 1 (April 2020) was targeted at the 'shielding' and higher risk of severe illness groups, Phase 2 (August 2020) for households with children and care leavers up to the age of 26. The third phase, rolled out in June 2021, focused on people participating in employability activities.

The ABZWorks team, which was also involved in the earlier phases, led the Council's successful Phase 3 bid, which other clusters, partner agencies and training providers were invited to join. In total 135 devices (86 Chromebooks and 49 wifi hubs) were distributed in Phase 3. Digital Champion support was provided by employability keyworkers, who were trained to SCQF levels four and six in Digital Inclusion Support through the scheme. Commissioned digital training was provided to recipients keen on furthering their skills.

### Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF)

PESF differs from the usual funded programmes in two particulars: it enables support to be provided to parents in employment, with the aim of upskilling them so they can move into better paid work and/or supporting them to access funded childcare so they

Page 192 can take on more hours; it allows for employability support to be provided to young parents who are still on the school roll.

The programme provides employability keyworker support to all participants, along with referrals to the Financial Inclusion Team for advice, and support to receive better off calculations and benefits checks to be carried out to ensure they are receiving all the funds they are entitled to.

PESF participants with ambitions of becoming self-employed can apply for seed funding to support them to set up their own business. Working in collaboration with Business Gateway, parents will receive support in developing a business plan and have access to a library of resources and training from Business Gateway, while keyworkers will support parents with other self-development needs, for example, an IT course or Microsoft Office course to enable them to be able to manage their own books.

The PESF programme worked in partnership with several organisations including NHS Grampian, Alcohol and Drugs Action, Health and Social Care, and Family Learning to create a Young Parents group held weekly at Tillydrone Community Campus. The purpose of the group was to provide young parents with coping strategies and tools to use when facing the challenges of being young parents. Keyworkers attended the weekly sessions and provided advice and support regarding learning, training, working, and volunteering.

These young parents are all also eligible for support via YPG. Parents registered with the PESF programme were able to access CFINE's Warehouse Skills Development Programme to put all the elements necessary in place for a candidate to apply for and gain full-time employment in any advertised warehouse positions they may find during their job search. Key elements of the programme include daily hands-on work experience in a warehouse, an employment reference, City & Guilds Employability Award, access to certificated e-learning courses, personal development, certificated learning: HACCP, food safety and forklift operator training, as well as cooking skills development.

Through Disabled PESF, Enable was commissioned to provide in-work support to eligible parents who have a disability, including mental health difficulties. Funding was provided to Aberdeen City Council's Financial Inclusion Team to provide an additional member of staff to support the money support aspect of PESF. A PESF Workforce Development Officer – a post shared and funded 50/50 with Aberdeenshire Council – informs businesses about free upskilling and workforce opportunities available to eligible staff and broader PESF opportunities which could improve the overall health, wellbeing, and financial situation of employees.

### Kickstart

Kickstart provided funding for employers who agreed to provide 16-25-year-olds with a paid work experience placement, with training and employability support built-in, for Page 193 25 hours per week for six months. The DWP paid National Minimum Wage and employers could, if they chose to do so, top up hours and wages at their own cost.

Following discussions with partner agencies across the public, private and third sectors, Aberdeen City Council submitted a successful bid to become a gateway

organisation to support employers to access the scheme, while simultaneously securing approval to become a Kickstart employer. Kickstart employers were required to provide young people with support and training to develop basic employability skills, as well as job specific skills to bolster their chances of securing long-term employment following the end of their placement.

The ABZWorks team supported 123 employers to access the scheme, resulting in the advertising of 338 vacancies, with 220 of those converting into placement starts. Aberdeen City Council employed 83 Kickstart interns, 52 of whom are still with us and 13 of whom have gone on to secure permanent roles within the authority to date.

The Waste and Recycling Team reported particular success in filling traditionally hard-to fill roles and attracting young people into an ageing workforce. Within the Council, every Kickstart intern had a mentor and was assigned an employability keyworker. Support was provided to managers and interns by the ABZWorks and People and Organisational Development teams, with tailored induction and skills development sessions delivered to the young people.

This type of internship is a first of its kind for the Council and has been widely welcomed by recruiting managers from a range of Clusters, who have been open to this approach and delighted with the skills, positive attitudes, ideas, and willingness to learn from these young people. All Aberdeen City Council interns received a minimum of 25 hours per week, paid at living wage rate in line with Council policy.

### Young Person Guarantee

Young Person Guarantee (YPG) promised a place in education, training, employment, or volunteering to all 16-24-year-olds in Scotland. Developing the Young Workforce used YPG funding to place employer school co-ordinators in every North-east secondary school. ABZWorks delivered employability keyworker support and commissioned the services of:

- Barnardos to deliver the TRIBE programme, which was designed in response to rising numbers of young people presenting with poor mental health during the pandemic;
- Working Rite to deliver RiteWorks – a pilot project to provide intensive employability support and improve the long-term outcomes of care experienced young people. Of 19 referred to date, seven have secured work – one of which is an apprenticeship; two have gone to college, one of whom has sustained; eight continue to receive support and two have disengaged.
- Tullos Training to provide practical taster courses across a range of technical specialities, including welding and engineering;
- Values into Action Scotland to deliver Project SEARCH for six young people with a disability;
- Passion for Social to develop the ABZWorks website.
- RoadWise to provide driving lessons to young people whose chances of employment would be increased if they had a licence;
- CFINE to deliver Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food to provide a taster of catering, teach young people how to cook healthy food on a budget, food safety; build confidence, improve literacy and numeracy skills, and provide each with a slow cooker and community pantry membership;

- CFINE to deliver warehouse training skills course, which includes gaining a forklift license and other qualifications;
- Aberdeen City Council's Creative Learning service to deliver confidence building activities through a range of creative activities.

In addition, through YPG, the service:

- Created a seed fund for young entrepreneurs, delivered in partnership with Business Gateway to ensure every young person accessing this funding had a solid business plan and advice and support about starting and running a business;
- Supported delivery of the successful inaugural Lift Off event for senior school pupils;
- Provided Chromebooks and mifi devices to young people in need;
- Supported delivery of Kickstart in the authority;
- Created two graduate internships;
- 'Adopted' an apprentice who had been made redundant – this young person has since completed the qualification and moved onto a permanent role in the Council;
- Trained employability keyworkers to deliver SQA accredited training to young people;
- Created a bespoke programme of support for young Afghan refugees, including access to ESOL provision, creative learning sessions with a focus on exploring and photographing the city and confidence to cook sessions.
- Provided transport costs, clothing, equipment, and bespoke training required by young people to enable them to access work experience, training, and/or employment;
- Created a project officer post to support the LEP and strengthen local partnerships;
- Developed a tailored programme of support for a group of 10 young Afghans to help them settle into the city and culture, develop their spoken and written English, and prepare them for the next steps towards education, formal training, or employment. This has included city tours, online ESOL classes, an eight-week cookery course with CFINE, photography course with Creative Learning, and sessions with the Countryside Rangers due to get underway shortly.

### No One Left Behind

As well as delivering employability keyworker support to NOLB participants, ABZWorks commissioned the services of:

- Apex to deliver the Labyrinth programme, offering specialist support targeted at individuals with convictions of a sexual nature;
- CFINE to deliver the Introduction to Skills Development course targeted at those further away from being work ready, at the earlier stages in their journey Page 195 providing confidence building and introductory courses on food safety and manual handling;
- Aberdeen Foyer to provide driver training, class 2 vehicle driver training, construction skills courses, door supervision courses, and community wellbeing groupwork sessions;
- Pitman Training to offer courses in medical administration, reception, and Microsoft packages;
- Triage to deliver short introductory courses in care and hospitality;
- EC-PC to deliver digital skills training courses. Further provision will be secured via the proposed procurement framework.

\*Note that in addition to NOLB, a number of these programmes offered spaces to participants engaging across the other Scottish Government funding streams.

### Long Term Unemployed Labour Market Opportunities

This £1.15million programme seeks to support 115 people aged 25+ experiencing long term (12 months or longer) unemployment and facing additional barriers to employment by providing paid 30 hours per week, six months work experience placements with third and public sector organisations. Placements must be paid at the Real Living Wage provide ongoing support for participants throughout the six months.

There is an expectation that participants will progress along the employability pipeline and that a high proportion of them will secure a work-based training qualification and permanent employment at the conclusion of the placement, though not necessarily with the host employer. At the time of writing, Aberdeen City Council has secured 86 placements and engagement with employers continues. Employers already signed up include Aberdeen Foyer, Station House Media Unit, Sport Aberdeen, Instant Neighbour, and Aberdeen Cyrenians. Aberdeen City Council has committed to 26 placements.

### PACE Plus

PACE Plus provided funding to create a single point of contact (SPOC) to the people in need of redundancy support to the ABZWorks team, provide intensive employability keyworker support to people at risk of redundancy, or who had been made redundant, training, and delivery of redundancy support events. 130 calls have been received via the SPOC to date.

### ABZWorks Website and Social Media Channels

The Socio-Economic Rescue Plan included a specific action for City Growth's ABZWorks Employability team to create a website to promote opportunities in the city. This action dovetailed with an aspiration of Integrated Children and Family Services colleagues to create a website to promote skills and career pathways, with a particular focus on growth areas. The teams joined forces to create the ABZWorks website [www.abzworks.co.uk](http://www.abzworks.co.uk)

Young people, school pupils, employability programme participants, and the Champions Board were involved in the development of the website. Funded through Young Person's Guarantee, ABZWorks provides an incredibly broad range of information, advice, support, and guidance to job seekers of all ages, including school pupils considering their careers, people facing or experiencing redundancy, long-term unemployed, families experiencing poverty, including in-work poverty, and information for parents and guardians to help guide their children. It sets out career pathways, promotes learning and training opportunities, links to support services.

The site uses friendly ways to get its message across, with a mixture of animations, infographics, videos, and text. Crucially, it takes a local focus, linking to the best national resources where appropriate, but is firmly rooted in the Granite City. The ABZWorks film showcasing Aberdeen as a city of opportunity brings home the wide variety of roles available here, including in the energy sector - particularly renewables,

health and social care, life sciences, construction, tourism, and hospitality, and more. Aberdeen City Council partnered with businesses, NESCol, Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen, Skills Development Scotland, and DYW-NE to build the site, which not only features the opportunities offered by the Council and the ABZWorks team, but also those of training providers and support agencies across the city. It also provides information and links to further assistance, including financial help and mental health and wellbeing support, with advice provided by NHS Grampian and the Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership.

The website and work of the ABZWorks team are supplemented by the ABZWorks social media channels. Since launching in June 2021, the website has attracted 3,500 users; the Facebook page has reached 45,032 people, with 3,2822 profile visits, and 314 new followers; Instagram reached 18,468 people, 794 profile views, and 166 followers.

#### North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF)

NEERSF brought together partners including Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Opportunity North East, Robert Gordon University, University of Aberdeen, Skills Development Scotland, Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, and ETZ Limited to deliver a £14.3million suite of 29 projects to support the economic recovery of the City Region by supporting businesses, boosting employment, and enhancing skill levels in the City Region.

Projects cover a range of sectors including energy, digital, health and social care, tourism and hospitality, food and drink, and agriculture, with entry level and upskilling courses available, as well as management training and accelerator activities. These include an Energy Sector Transition Accelerator, Accelerator Start Up and Innovation Funds, Graduates into Business programme, Expansion of the Digital Start Fund, Climate Emergency and Carbon Literacy Training for SMEs, a Regional Energy Workforce Demand and Skills Review, Health and Social Care short courses, fee waivers on a selection of university short courses, Gourmet Food Open Doors Festival, and the Hospitality Apprenticeship North East scheme.

Aberdeen City Council is directly responsible for delivery of: an internships and paid work experience scheme for people aged 25+; a project to support under-16s who are at risk of disengaging from education; and a fund to ensure that any additional barriers people may have to accessing any of the projects can be addressed.

#### Community Benefits

The ABZWorks team includes a Community Benefits officer who is responsible for ensuring the delivery of Community Benefits requirements from contracts let by the Council. This includes the provision of training and work experience opportunities, apprenticeships, and information events.

Activities over the past year include a Meet the Buyer event to promote sub-contracting opportunities for CHAP (Aberdeen) Ltd to local business for Summerhill housing, Tillydrone housing, and Northfield Pool works; and a construction skills and employment opportunities information event, with provision of 1-2-1 CV building sessions supported by ABZWorks keyworkers, held at Aberdeen Art Gallery by CHAP

Construction. An employability event to promote opportunities with Council contractors is in the planning stages, with good buy-in from firms which have committed to attending the event. The Community Benefits officer continues working to ensure delivery of community benefits requirements against contracts.

### Business Support

Through delivery of bite-size Business Booster sessions, learning and information opportunities are provided to SMEs to help strengthen the organisations and highlight potential opportunities and changing legislation. Prior to the pandemic these were delivered in-person at Marischal College and provided networking opportunities. The appetite from SMEs to participate online during the pandemic was negligible, as their focus was elsewhere.

Meet the Buyer events are delivered on behalf of organisations seeking to offer sub-contracting opportunities to local firms in the delivery of major contracts and linked to community benefits. These are usually for Council projects and aim to secure local business and employment opportunities, but are also available on request for external organisations delivering projects in the city. A Meet the Buyer event for Chap Construction to promote opportunities to sub-contract for the housing development and Northfield Pool works attracted 47 attendees.

### Work Experience Unit

The work experience unit works closely with schools to provide long and short-term placements for secondary pupils, ensuring all health and safety requirements are met and that pupils can receive a placement which is relevant to them. The work experience officers also help to secure placements for employability programme participants. Opportunities for school pupils and employability programme participants to participate in 'real' work experience placements were severely impacted by the pandemic. Several online opportunities were created; however, these do not provide the same valuable experience as in-person placements and present a range of potential safeguarding issues, which the team is working with education and DYW-NE colleagues to resolve.

Placements for	Placements confirmed	H&S completed	visits	In progress
Career Ready	19	11		Placements start in July
Foundation Apprenticeships	11	6		
Schools	67	23		32
Keyworkers	5	2		18
Doctors at Work	49	0		

### Recruitment and Redundancy Events

ABZWorks delivers jobs fairs in partnership with DWP, with priority for space given to industries hardest hit by the economic situation. This has seen particular demand from care providers. A jobs fair event at the Beach Ballroom on 6 October 2021 attracted

280 attendees. A redundancy support event attended by a range of support and advice agencies, including social work, Financial Inclusion Team, Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership, DWP, and a number of training providers, took place the day before the jobs fair and attracted 26 individuals. In addition, the ABZWorks team presented at several redundancy webinars delivered by Skills Development Scotland and delivered sessions directly to businesses with staff facing redundancy. Further recruitment events are in the planning stages. An Employability Training Services information event to promote the availability and breadth of employability support across the city took place in April 2022. It attracted 77 members of the public and included a networking session for training providers.

### Community Work

ABZWorks keyworkers have provided services across the city, including at the Tillydrone and Torry Hubs, libraries, and the Job Centre.