



Taking Action on Rural Poverty

Aberdeenshire: Initial Scoping Work

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Citation: Bowman, N. (2024) 'Taking Action on Rural Poverty: Initial Scoping Work in Aberdeenshire', Glasgow: Poverty Alliance

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The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

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The Poverty Alliance is recognised as a charity by the Inland Revenue. Reference No: SCO19926

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Acknowledgements

This work was funded by The Robertson Trust. We would also like to acknowledge the Aberdeenshire Council staff who took the time to support the development of this work.





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Summary

The Poverty Alliance has embarked on a new project Taking Action on Rural Poverty, that will develop new ways of tackling the rural poverty premium, with a focus on Aberdeenshire and Argyll and Bute. This briefing was undertaken as initial scoping work to help us better understand the Aberdeenshire local authority area.

Aberdeenshire is the fourth largest geographical local authority in Scotland, and almost half of its residents live in rural and remote rural areas. While SIMD data tells us that overall, Aberdeenshire is a relatively affluent area, this measure struggles to accurately capture rural poverty due to its dispersed nature. Sixteen per cent of children and young people in Aberdeenshire were living in relative poverty in 2021/2022¹, more than two thirds of whom were living in working households². While economic activity is higher in Aberdeenshire than Scotland as a whole, retail, manufacturing and health and social work are key industries within the area³, all of which have been identified as industries playing a key role in maintaining in-work poverty⁴.

The higher cost of living in rural areas means that the cost-of-living crisis is being felt more acutely by many households in rural communities. In 2023, Aberdeenshire was named the most expensive county in Scotland for childcare⁵ and approximately 41% of households in Aberdeenshire are off the gas grid⁶, making them reliant on more expensive alternatives methods of heating their homes. The impact of soaring living costs is reflected in a 16% rise in Scottish Welfare Fund applications in Aberdeenshire between 2021-22 and 2022-23⁷, and a record high number of food parcels distributed by the Trussell Trust in the area in 2022-23⁸.

Aberdeenshire Council have implemented a variety of local initiatives to tackle rural poverty and current priorities identified by the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities strategy group. These include: developing a Cash First Partnership to support financial inclusion, increasing financial support to households off the gas grid, improving access to services for those in remote and rural areas, increasing opportunities for co-production and exploring flexible childcare models and a deep dive into transportation options with their Local Voices Forum.



Taking Action on Rural Poverty: Project Overview

The [Cross Party Group on Poverty's](#) recent inquiry into rural poverty has illuminated this issue and how it is being exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. Historically, poverty has been framed as a predominantly urban issue, largely due to the rural 'idyll' that masks the reality of life in rural places for many. This has resulted in rural poverty going relatively ignored or being met with inadequate policy responses that are designed from urban perspectives. However, people living in rural areas who are on a low income are faced with both the poverty premium as well as the rural premium i.e., the higher cost of living in rural, remote and island areas. There is a clear need to change our approach to tackling poverty to better meet the needs of rural communities.

This is why The Poverty Alliance have embarked on a new three-year project '[Taking Action on Rural Poverty](#)', that will develop new ways of addressing rural poverty in Scotland by tackling the rural poverty premium. With a focus on Aberdeenshire and Argyll and Bute, this project will engage people with lived experience, voluntary and community organizations, and public and private sector bodies to establish and test pilot up to two practical, local measures to address the rural poverty premium. We will also work to increase opportunities for people with lived experience to feed into local decision making and influence policy at a national level.

The current briefing was undertaken as initial scoping work to help us better understand the local authorities we will be working within throughout the duration of this project.



Local Authority Context

Aberdeenshire is the fourth largest geographical local authority in Scotland with a population of 263,900. Almost half of Aberdeenshire's population live in rural and remote rural areas.

Aberdeenshire is the fourth largest geographical local authority of the 32 local authorities in Scotland. It is predominantly rural, with a population of 263,900 according to the 2022 census data - an increase of 4.3% since the 2011 census. The population is projected to increase by 6,400 people (2.5%) between mid 2018 – mid 2028, which is above the Scottish average of 1.8%⁹. In 2022, there were 114,897 households in Aberdeenshire¹⁰.

Aberdeenshire comprises of 19 wards across six areas Banff and Buchan, Buchan, Formartine, Garioch, Marr and Kincardine and Mearns (image 1) and comprises of three constituencies: Banff and Buchan, Gordon, and West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine.



Image 1: Map of Aberdeenshire. Source: Household Income in Aberdeenshire, 2023

Just over one third of Aberdeenshire's population live in accessible rural areas (35%), and 13.4% are remote rural. The remainder of the population can be broken down as follows: 30.4% live in 'other urban' areas, 14.4% live in 'accessible small towns', 6.8% in 'remote small towns'. Table 1 shows how this compares to Scotland as a whole.



Table 1. Percent of population in each 6-fold Urban Rural category: Aberdeenshire & Scotland

	LARGE URBAN AREAS	OTHER URBAN AREAS	ACCESSIBLE SMALL TOWNS	REMOTE SMALL TOWNS	ACCESSIBLE RURAL	REMOTE
ABERDEENSHIRE		30.4	14.4	6.8	35.0	13.4
SCOTLAND	34.6	36.2	8.5	3.5	11.2	5.9

Source: [Energy Company Obligation: Flexible Eligibility. Aberdeenshire Council \(n.d.\)](#)



Labour Market Trends in Aberdeenshire

Between July 2022-June 2023 economic activity was higher in Aberdeenshire than for Scotland as a whole (83.3% vs 77.9%) however, job density is lower (0.74 vs 0.81). When looking at earnings by place of residence, these are slightly higher for Aberdeenshire than Scotland as a whole, however when looking at earnings by place of work, these are lower.

In 2021, the working age population of Aberdeenshire (those aged 16-64) was 160,500, with slightly more males (80,500) than females (80,000). Between October 2022- September 2023, there were 149,900 economically active people, or 83.3%, which was higher than for Scotland as a whole (77.9%), of whom 82% (147,500) were in employment and 2.1% (3,200) were unemployed. More males than females were economically active (84.5% and 82.2% respectively).¹¹

Between the same period there were 28,400 people who were not in paid employment in Aberdeenshire (16.7%) which is lower than for Scotland as a whole (22.1%). The largest group were retired people (33% compared with 14% in Scotland as a whole). Between January-December 2022, there were 10,000 workless householdsⁱ (12.8% compared with 17.8% in Scotland) and in 2021, job densityⁱⁱ was lower in Aberdeenshire (0.74) than in Scotland as a whole (0.81)¹².

In 2023, when looking at earnings by place of residenceⁱⁱⁱ, median gross weekly pay for full-time workers in Aberdeenshire was £739.90 compared with £702.40 in Scotland and £682.60 in Great Britain. Median hourly pay excluding overtime for full-time workers was £18.12 compared with £18.09 in Scotland and £17.49 in Great Britain. Table 2 displays these figures for males and females¹³. Higher earnings by place of residence in Aberdeenshire than Aberdeen City likely reflects households who can commute to Aberdeen City for work or work remotely. When we look at earnings by place of work^{iv}, we find that these are lower in Aberdeenshire than Scotland as a whole, and substantially lower than in Aberdeen City (Table 3).

Table 2: Aberdeenshire - Earnings by place of residence (2023)

	ABERDEENSHIRE (£)	ABERDEEN CITY (£)	SCOTLAND (£)	GREAT BRITAIN (£)
MEDIAN GROSS WEEKLY PAY				
FULL-TIME WORKERS	739.9	710.9	702.4	682.6
MALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	763.7	706.9	725.7	728.3
FEMALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	717.6	725.3	672.0	628.8

ⁱ Households where no-one aged 16 or over is in employment. These members may be unemployed or may be unavailable to work because of family commitments, retirement or study, or unable to work through sickness or disability.

ⁱⁱ Job density figures represent the total number of jobs per resident aged 16-64. Job density of 1.0 would mean there is one job to each resident in this age group.

ⁱⁱⁱ The figures show the median earnings in pounds for employees *living* in the area who are on adults rates of pay and whose pay was not affected by absence.

^{iv} The figures show the median earnings in pounds for employees *working* in the area who are on adults rates of pay and whose pay was not affected by absence.



MEDIAN HOURLY PAY - EXCLUDING OVERTIME				
FULL-TIME WORKERS	18.12	1821	18.09	17.49
MALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	17.54	17.02	18.17	18.15
FEMALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	19.02	18.84	18.00	16.64

Source: [ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis](#)

Table 3: Aberdeenshire - Earnings by place of work (2023)

	ABERDEENSHIRE (£)	ABERDEEN CITY (£)	SCOTLAND (£)	GREAT BRITAIN (£)
MEDIAN GROSS WEEKLY PAY				
FULL-TIME WORKERS	674.8	780.0	702.8	682.6
MALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	689.5	802.8	727.9	728.3
FEMALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	611.9	728.2	670.8	629.1
MEDIAN HOURLY PAY – EXCLUDING OVERTIME				
FULL-TIME WORKERS	15.72	19.16	18.10	17.49
MALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	15.72	18.83	18.24	18.14
FEMALE FULL-TIME WORKERS	15.61	19.49	17.93	16.65

Source: [ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis](#)

It is important to bear in mind that women are more likely than men to work part-time in all areas of Scotland, with 73% of part-time workers in Scotland being women¹⁴. This is particularly true in rural Scotland, where 46% of employed females work part-time in their main job (both in remote and accessible rural areas) compared to 40% in the rest of Scotland¹⁵.



Aberdeenshire Poverty Context: Scale of Poverty and Inequality

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (2020)

SIMD data shows that Aberdeenshire is overall relatively affluent, with just 2.6% of data zones in Aberdeenshire falling within the 20% most deprived in Scotland. However, this measure struggles to accurately capture rural poverty due to its dispersed nature. Therefore, when used alone, findings should be interpreted with caution.

The SIMD is Scotland's official tool for identifying areas in which deprivation is concentrated, so that targeted interventions and support can be provided. This measure identifies deprivation according to the following domains: Income, Employment, Education, Health, Access to Services, Crime and Housing. However, it has come under criticism for failing to capture deprivation within rural areas, largely due to the dispersed nature of rural poverty i.e., not all deprived people live in deprived areas, and equally not everyone in a deprived area is deprived, as well as an inability to capture differences within large rural data zones. As such, the Scottish Government recommends using SIMD data in conjunction with other sources to more adequately identify rural poverty¹⁶. A failure of income and deprivation measures to account for the higher costs of living in rural areas (i.e., the rural premium) has also been highlighted¹⁷.

With that in mind, SIMD data tells us that overall, Aberdeenshire is relatively affluent (image 2). As described above, pockets of deprivation and isolation in this rural local authority results in poverty issues often remaining hidden, and strong, informal personal networks of support have been reported to be invaluable for people experiencing poverty in this area¹⁸. [The 2020 SIMD release](#) showed that nine of the 340 data zones in Aberdeenshire (2.6%) fall within the 20% most deprived in Scotland, all of which are in the more urbanised areas of Fraserburgh and Peterhead; and one data zone is in the 10% most deprived, which is Fraserburgh Harbour and Broadsea¹⁹.

Notably, 149 (44%) of Aberdeenshire's data zones are within the 20% most deprived in Scotland when it comes to access to services i.e., average drive times and public transport times to key services, and average broadband speeds; and 52 of these (15.3%) are considered within the 5% most deprived. The lowest ranking data zone for access is found in the Inch, Oyne and Ythanwells area in Garioch, and is the 53rd most deprived of the 6,976 data zones in Scotland for access.

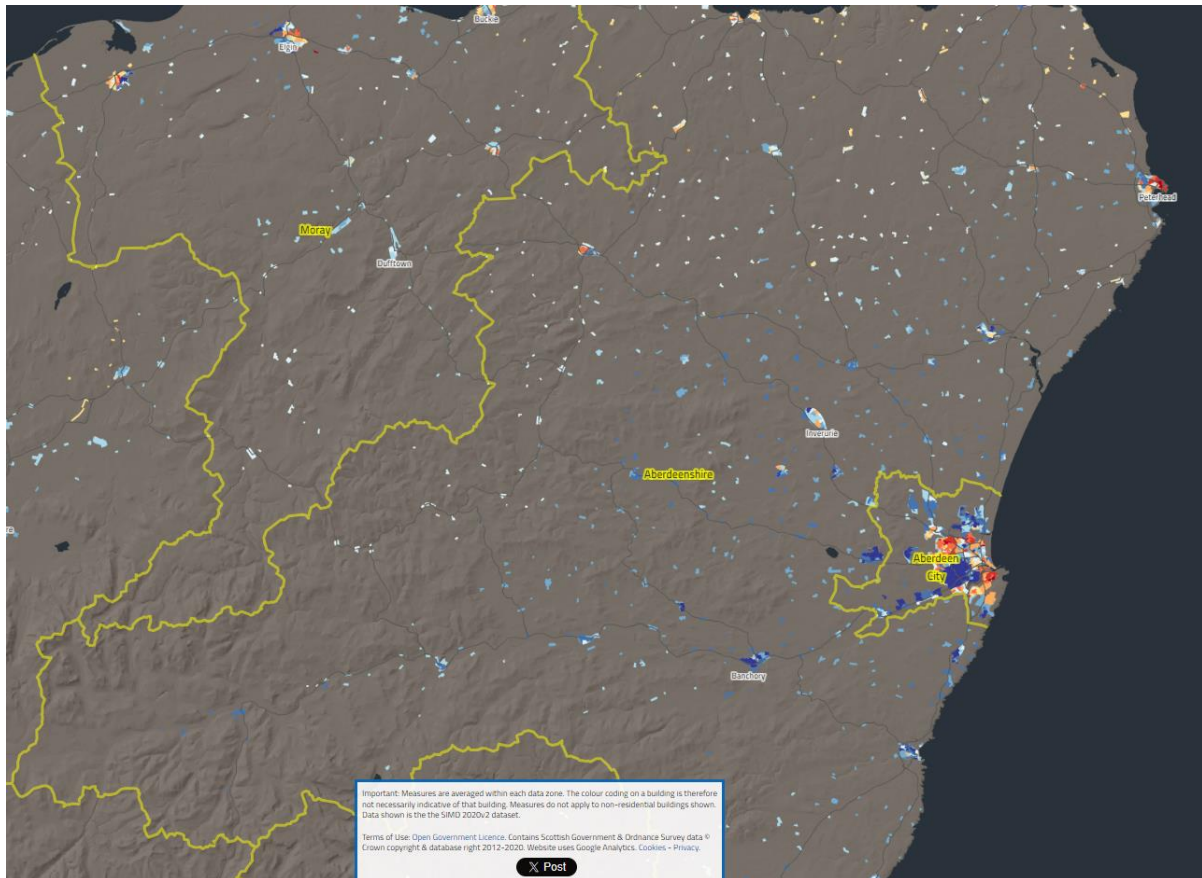


Image 2: SIMD 2020 Map of Aberdeenshire. Source: <https://simd.scot/#/simd2020/BTTTT/9/-4.0000/55.9000/>

Child Poverty

Child poverty in Aberdeenshire is lower than for Scotland as a whole (16% versus 24%), however it has increased over the last year and is highest in the constituency of Banff and Buchan, at 22.8%.

In 2021, Aberdeenshire recorded the 4th highest 0-18 population of Scottish local authorities; approximately 21.7% of the populations is made up of children and young people under the age of 19, which is higher than the Scottish local authority average of 19.9%²⁰.

According to the latest Child Poverty Figures²¹, 16% of children and young people (aged 15 and under) in Aberdeenshire were living in relative poverty in 2021/2022 i.e., children in families earning below 60% of the median income after housing costs. This is equivalent to 8,799 children (table 4) and is an increase of 1.8% from the previous year.

Table 4: Comparison of child poverty rates in Aberdeenshire 2014/15 - 2021/22

DATE	CHILDREN IN POVERTY	CHILDREN IN POVERTY (%)	PERCENTAGE POINT CHANGE
2014/15	8,444	15.6%	
2021/22	8,799	16.0%	0.4%



Most of these families are located within the constituency of Banff and Buchan (22.8%). Large families with three plus children are almost twice as likely to be living in poverty as those with just one or two children, and data from 2021/22 shows that over 5% of all children in Aberdeenshire (3,050) were living in a family impacted by the two-child limit, again most of whom are in Banff and Buchan (table 5).²²

Table 5: Child poverty rates across Aberdeenshire constituencies 2021/22

CONSTITUENCY	CHILDREN IN POVERTY	CHILDREN IN POVERTY (%)	CHILDREN IN FAMILIES AFFECTED BY 2-CHILD LIMIT (%)
BANFF AND BUCHAN	1,360	22.8%	8%
GORDON	920	15.2%	4%
WEST ABERDEENSHIRE & KINCARDINE	770	12.8%	4%

Source: [End Child Poverty](#)

Higher rates of child poverty in Banff and Buchan may reflect higher deprivation within the areas of Peterhead and Fraserburgh according to SIMD data. However, as discussed earlier in this briefing, not all these children will be living in deprived areas, some will be in relatively affluent communities and rural or remote locations. Child poverty in all three constituencies has increased since 2020/2021 (figure 1).

How has child poverty in your area changed over time?

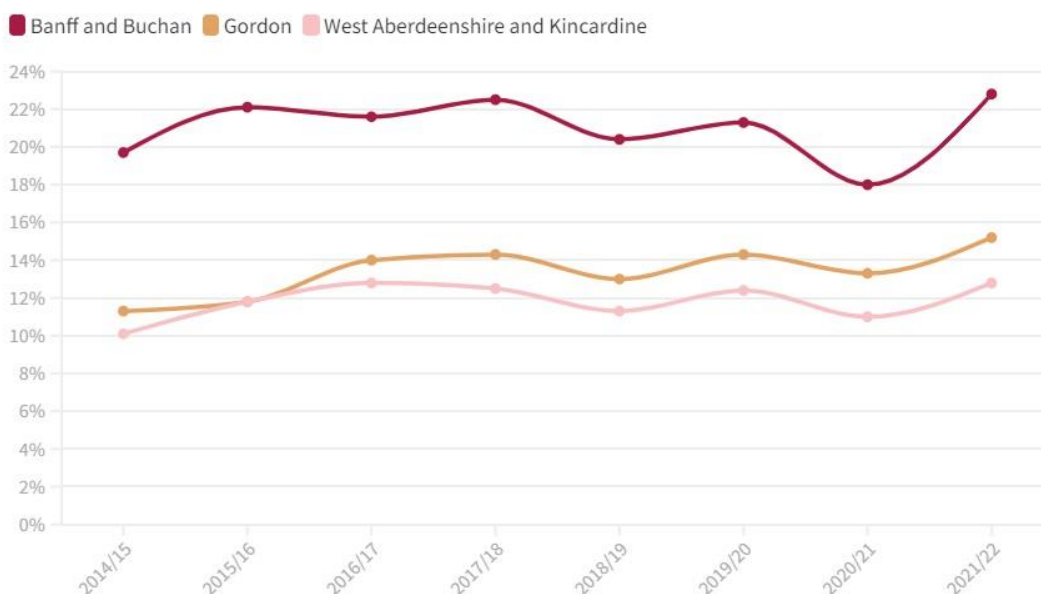
Select up to five areas to compare

Banff and Buchan

Gordon

Type here to find your constituency

West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine



Source: [End Child Poverty Coalition](#)



Figure 1: Child Poverty in Aberdeenshire. Source: [Action for Children: Where is Child Poverty Increasing in the UK?](#)

In 2022/23, 4,737 children and young people in Aberdeenshire were entitled to free school meals, clothing grants and bridging payments, which is an increase from 2,556 in 2019/20²³. This sharp increase is thought to reflect changes to the application and payment process since the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, families were required to apply in-person at school which deterred many families due to the stigma associated with receiving free school meals. During COVID, the process was centralized and digitized, coupled with a big push on digital inclusion and a switch to making direct payments to families which has resulted in more applications being received.

In-work Poverty

Retail, manufacturing and health and social work are key industries within Aberdeenshire, all of which fall within the top five industries with the highest prevalence of in-work poverty.

In-work poverty is a result of low wages and insecure hours. The incidence of persistent low pay has been found to be significantly greater in rural than urban areas, possibly because of fewer opportunities to work for large employers²⁴. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identified five 'high priority industries' i.e. industries with the *"highest prevalence of in-work poverty amongst their employees and their families and where workers in in-work poverty are most likely to work."*²⁵ These were retail, health and social work, hospitality, administration and support services, and manufacturing. In 2022, the largest industries in Aberdeenshire were Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles (14.1%) and Manufacturing (13.1%), followed by Professional, Scientific and Technical activities (12.1%), Education (9.1%) and Human Health and Social Work (9.1%).²⁶ As mentioned above, jobs density is lower in Aberdeenshire (0.74 than in Scotland (0.81)²⁷ and average household incomes in Aberdeenshire have only increased by 15% over the last five years, compared with 25% for Scotland as a whole²⁸. Over two thirds of children living in poverty in Aberdeenshire live in working households²⁹.



Social Security Uptake in Aberdeenshire

Rates of benefit uptake are often lower in rural than urban areas. In March 2023, Aberdeenshire was the local authority in Scotland with the lowest rates of Scottish Child Payment uptake. There were 15,080 people claiming Universal Credit in October 2023, and the soaring cost-of-living is reflected in a 16% increase in Scottish Welfare Fund applications between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Rates of benefit uptake are often lower in rural than urban areas, due to stigma within small communities and a lack of access to information and advice services³⁰. A snapshot of Local Authority estimates of Scottish Child Payment take-up in March 2023 named Aberdeenshire the local authority with the lowest take-up rates, at 75%^{v 31}.

Universal Credit

Between August 2022 – August 2023 the number of households claiming Universal Credit (UC) in Aberdeenshire increased from 10,379 to 11,371³². As of November 2023, there were 15,150 people claiming UC in the local authority, 6,112 of whom were in employment³³. The Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Local Action Report for 2022/23 breaks down UC claimants according to the following priority families:

- 4,210 Single parent households
- 1,164 Families with 3+ children
- 646 UC Disability entitlement

When looking at out of work benefits, data from Nomis as of December 2023, shows that 2,835 people in Aberdeenshire were claiming out-of-work benefits (1.8%), which is lower than Scotland as a whole (3.0%). The Nomis claimant count combines UC claimants who are required to seek work, with those who are claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). Most UC claimants in this count will be unemployed but a few will be working with very low earnings.³⁴ Table 6 displays Out of Work Benefits Claimants by age and sex.

Table 6: Out of Work Benefits Claimants by age and sex in Aberdeenshire, December 2023

	Aberdeenshire (Numbers)	Aberdeenshire (%)	Scotland (%)	Great Britain (%)
All People	2,835	1.8	3.0	3.7
Sex*				
Males	1,540	1.9	3.6	4.2
Females	1,295	1.6	2.5	3.2
Age**				
Aged 16 To 17	30	0.5	0.7	0.2
Aged 18 To 24	495	2.9	4.2	5.0
Aged 18 To 21	300	3.1	4.4	5.2
Aged 25 To 49	1,615	2.0	3.6	4.3
Aged 50+	690	1.2	2.0	2.7

Source: [Nomis Labour Market Profile - Aberdeenshire](#)

^v Orkney, Shetland and Na h-Eileanan Siar were not included due to numbers deemed too low for confidence in estimates.



*% is the number of claimants as a proportion of resident population of area aged 16-64 and gender

** % is number of claimants as a proportion of resident population of the same age



Scottish Welfare Fund

Over the last few years, between the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis, low-income households have faced, and continue to be at risk of, multiple income shocks. The Trussell Trust reported record levels of need in Scotland in 2022/23, with numbers of food parcels distributed increasing by 30% from the previous year, and 50% from 2017/18³⁵. The Scottish Government's Cash First Programme aims to increase access to emergency financial assistance for those experiencing hardship via a cash-first response and end the need for foodbanks. Emergency cash payments allow people to purchase the essentials they need with dignity and choice.

The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) was established in 2013 and is the Scottish Government's leading source of cash-first emergency assistance. Investment in the fund has been maintained as part of the Cash-First Programme³⁶. The SWF provides discretionary assistance to households experiencing financial hardship in the form of Crisis Grants to help in emergencies, and Community Care Grants to support people to begin or continue living a settled life in their community. While it was originally intended as a one-time safety net for people in crisis, the soaring cost of living is resulting in a significant increase in repeat applications and causing the fund to come under pressure³⁷.

In Aberdeenshire in 2022-23 a total of 10,825 SWF applications were made. This is 16% (1,465) more than 2021-22 and applications have been steadily increasing since 2013/14, when 3,005 applications were received (figure 2).

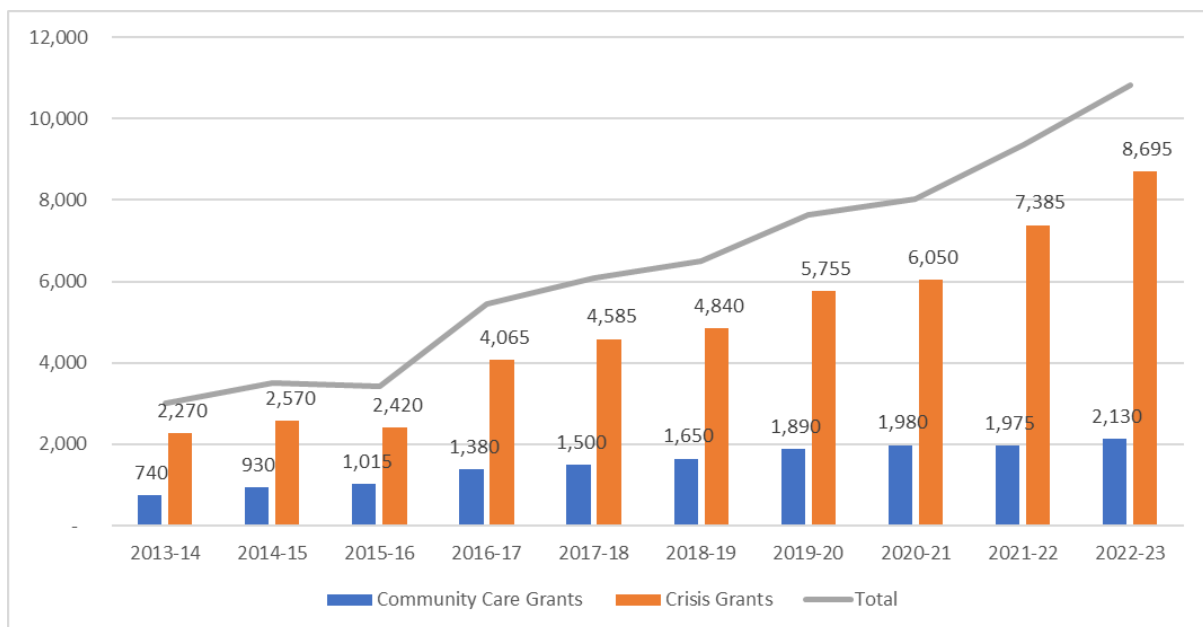


Figure 2: Social Welfare Fund applications in Aberdeenshire from 2013-2023.

Source: [Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: Annual Update 2022-2023](#)



Of these applications, 8,695 applications were for Crisis Grants (CGs), which is 18% (1,310) more than in 2021-22, and of which 65% (5,657) were accepted. The total spend for the year was £754,613 and the average award was £133. Data from quarter 4 shows that for 97% of CG applications an initial decision was made by the next working day and the most common reasons for CG applications were: Emergency (2,020), Other (235), Other – delay in benefits (140), Disaster (10).

The remaining 2,130 applications were for Community Care Grants (CCG) (an increase of 8% (155) compared with 2021-22), of which 56% (1,200) were accepted. The total spend for the year was £759,649 and the average award was £632. In Q4 most CCG applications (90%) were processed within 15 days of receiving the request and the most common reasons for applications were: Families facing exceptional pressure (160), Other reason (140), Helping people to stay in the community (110), Planned resettlement after an unsettled way of life (105), Moving out of residential/institutional accommodation (30).



Cost of Living Crisis and Key Issues in Rural Areas

The cost-of-living crisis has been felt more acutely by many people living in rural areas because of the rural premium. In 2023, Aberdeenshire was named the most expensive county in Scotland for childcare and approximately 41% of households in Aberdeenshire are off the gas grid, compared with 16% for Scotland as a whole. Between April 2022-March 2023 Trussel Trust foodbanks in Aberdeenshire distributed 9,770 parcels to 6,861 adults and 2,909 children.

The rural premium includes the higher costs of food, clothing, household essentials, energy/fuel and transportation in remote, rural and island areas compared to urban parts of the UK, and research has shown that this typically adds between 15-30% more to household budgets.³⁸ This has been exacerbated by the centralization of essential services over recent years resulting in a lack of access to childcare, healthcare and welfare advice to name a few³⁹. Volatile and unpredictable incomes from seasonal and casual work are common in rural areas and welfare support uptake is often lower⁴⁰.

Childcare Costs

A lack of childcare in remote, rural and island areas poses a problem across Scotland, including a lack of wrap-around care during holidays and term-time. If it exists at all, cost and limited public transportation options create additional barriers. Within rural settings, those with children with extra support needs, or who do not have the support of family and friends are often most impacted⁴¹.

Childcare is a key outgoing for families and recent research named Aberdeenshire the most expensive county in Scotland for childcare costs, which averaged at £67.10 per day and £1,341.98 per month^{42, 43}. Inability to afford childcare and transportation is increasingly impeding Aberdeenshire people's ability to work, and a lack of family friendly employers who can offer sustainable employment has been reported. Lone-parents and parents with a disabled child or children are the most impacted due to increased need for flexibility, many of whom are working multiple part-time jobs as a result⁴⁴.

Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty is disproportionately high in rural Scotland⁴⁵. In addition to the overarching, recognised drivers of fuel poverty i.e., energy prices, income, energy efficiency of homes and energy use, Changeworks (2023) identified several rural specific drivers, including cold and harsh climates, higher living costs, fewer employment and training opportunities for higher paid and higher skilled jobs, a lack of affordable housing and a lack of access to advice and support services.

Many rural areas are not connected to the main gas grid, making households dependent on alternative, more expensive forms of energy such as oil and electricity. Old, detached and poorly insulated houses are hard to heat and can be hard to retrofit and when combined with the harsh weather conditions faced by many rural and island communities, this drives fuel costs up further. Government schemes to support



energy costs have not accounted for these disparities meaning that in rural areas these schemes support do not go as far to mitigate rising costs⁴⁶.

Approximately 41% of households in Aberdeenshire are off the gas grid, compared with 16% for Scotland as a whole and the rurality of this large geographical area requires increased consumption of petroleum products to get around⁴⁷. While transport-related fuel costs are often not included in fuel poverty definitions, Changeworks (2023) report that transport is the largest additional cost for rural households, due to both more expensive petrol prices and longer distances travelled. In 2022, more than one third of Aberdeenshire households (34%) were estimated to be living in fuel poverty^{vi} 48 and it is ranked 23rd of the 32 local authorities in terms of risk of fuel poverty by the [Fuel Poverty Index](#). According to the Scottish Housing Regulator, just over three quarters (78.2%) of Aberdeenshire Council's homes met the Scottish Housing Quality Standard^{vii} in 2022/23, which was slightly below the Scottish average of 79%⁴⁹. Over the last year, Aberdeenshire has seen an increase in households with children seeking advice on how to reduce fuel bills and more families are switching to prepaid meters due to fuel debt⁵⁰, which in turn leads to higher bills to due to the increased cost of energy when using a prepaid meter.

Food Insecurity

“Food insecurity is when an individual or household has insufficient or insecure access to food due to resource constraints” ([The Food Foundation, 2016](#)). As mentioned earlier, the multiple income shocks low-income households have been faced with over recent years is reflected in record levels of food parcels distributed by the Trussell Trust in 2023. While food bank usage can be a helpful indicator of increasing food insecurity, it is important to bear in mind that this is not an accurate measure and has been found to significantly underestimate food insecurity levels. This is because it does not capture households receiving food parcels from across all organizations, or those in need but not accessing emergency food aid due to barriers such as stigma and a lack of access to services⁵¹.

The cost of food in rural areas is also higher, with weekly food costs as much as 4% and 13% higher than in urban areas for remote rural and island communities respectively, and prices in local convenience stores higher than supermarkets by as much as 44% in remote rural areas, and 27% in the Islands⁵².

In Aberdeenshire, the Trussell Trust has two main food banks: Aberdeenshire North and Aberdeenshire South, both of which opened in 2013. Aberdeenshire North has five centres: Inverurie, Ellon, Huntly, Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Aberdeenshire South has one centre in Banchory. Between April 2022-March 2023 Aberdeenshire distributed 9,770 parcels to 6,861 adults and 2,909 children⁵³. This is the highest number of parcels delivered in one year since data is available (2017/18), as shown in Table 4.

^{vi}This data was produced by Energy Action Scotland and provides estimated fuel poverty rates as of April 1, 2022 using 2019 Social Housing Condition Survey data and an uplift percentage estimated by the Scottish Government.

^{vii} [Scottish Housing Quality Standard](#) (SHQS) mean social landlords must ensure their tenants' homes are energy efficient, safe and secure, not seriously damaged and have kitchens and bathrooms that are in good condition.



Table 4: Trussell Trust End of Year Statistics: Total number of parcels delivered by Aberdeenshire Foodbanks

YEAR	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
NUMBER OF CENTRES	4	5	6	6	6	6
TOTAL PARCELS DISTRIBUTED	3,764	4,952	6,586	9,705	8,594	9,770
PARCELS FOR ADULTS	2,533	3,310	4,393	6,349	5,698	6,861
PARCELS FOR CHILDREN	1,231	1,642	2,193	3,356	2,896	2,909

Source: [Trussell Trust End of Year Statistics](#)

The [Towards a Fairer Aberdeenshire Annual Report 2022](#) also states that *Connecting with Communities* supported 561 people over the previous 12 months, 232 of whom were children. This program aims to ensure residents in targeted remote and rural areas with limited transport links and food support are accessing healthy food and good quality produce at a low cost. The Heat and Eat project also supported 434 households with 618 food vouchers.



Current Priorities

The [Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Action Report 2022/23](#) states that Aberdeenshire will focus on those living in rural and remote communities and have added to the priority families at high risk of poverty^{viii}, as follows:

- Lone parent families.
- A household where someone is disabled.
- Families with three or more children.
- Minority ethnic families.
- Families with a child under one year old.
- Families where the mother is under 25 years of age.
- Families that are affected by in-work poverty.
- Families that are within those communities that are least heard such as gypsy/traveller communities.
- Families impacted by the criminal justice system.
- Families affected by addiction.

Priorities areas for 2023 outlined in the [Towards a Fairer Aberdeenshire Annual Report 2022](#) include:

- Continuing to develop a **Cash First Partnership** to support financial inclusion. This approach includes information and advice around income maximisation, welfare rights and debt and more than 8,250 individuals were supported in 2022.
- Ensuring that **households off the grid** can access all the financial support they are entitled to especially around fuel.
- Exploring **flexible childcare** models.
- Developing a lived experience panel with a focus on **transport**.
- Improving **access to services** for those in rural and remote areas.
- Increase opportunities for **co-production**.

Some additional Next Steps identified in the [Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Action Report 2022/23](#) include:

- Developing employability programmes to support priority families seeking employment.
- Supporting working parents to stay in work through accessing Parental Support Fund, Tax Free Childcare, and gaining skills/qualifications to progress their career.
- Recruiting Child Poverty Employability Workers to address barriers to securing/sustaining work e.g., money advice, transport, affordable childcare, digital access.
- Increasing access to employment/training for parents and young people in rural and remote areas.
- Increase access to ESOL, digital skills, literacy support for priority families.

^{viii} As part of a local level work, scoping and partnership work extended the focus of the family structures they wished to work with.



- Creating key worker positions for parents requiring further support i.e., around health & wellbeing with opportunities for parents with lived experience to secure these posts.
- Training for the childcare sector to address recruitment and retention challenges.
- Piloting a childcare training academy targeting a rural setting which will also deliver wrap around childcare for those with primary age children.



Local Initiatives to Tackle Rural Poverty

The Aberdeenshire [Community Planning Partnership](#) (CPP's) [Local Outcomes Improvement Plan \(LOIP\)](#) defines the following three key priorities:

- [Reducing Poverty](#)^{ix}: Led by the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategy Group with key involvement from the Aberdeenshire Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Partnership and includes support for the Northern Alliance Aims to close the attainment gap.
- [Connected and Cohesive Communities](#): Developing Locality Plans within three more disadvantaged localities according to SIMD to improve connections within the community i.e., access to services, physical connections (broadband, transport and road networks) and social connections.
- [Health and Wellbeing](#): MindYerMind Campaign and Healthy Eating Active Living

The [Reducing Poverty Action Plan 2018-2028](#) focuses on six key themes aiming to address the three main drivers of poverty i.e., employment, household costs and social security. These themes are Local Voices and Partnerships, Reducing the Cost of Living including Housing Costs, Improved Digital Inclusion and Connectedness, Income Maximisation, Improving Health and Wellbeing, and Future Focused Economy and Skills Development.

The [Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Strategy Group \(TP&I\)](#) is the main partnership around poverty in Aberdeenshire and is leading on this priority. The TP&I report to the CPP and various partnership groups from across Aberdeenshire feed into the TP&I as shown in Image 3.



Image 3: Aberdeenshire TP&I Reporting Structure.

Source: <https://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/our-priorities/tackling-poverty-inequalities/>

^{ix} This priority was previously called Reducing Child Poverty, but the title was changed “to encompass all aspects of poverty for families and households across Aberdeenshire.”



- The [Financial Inclusion Partnership](#) was developed to ensure that people can access the relevant advice, information and support to enhance their quality of life and used a joint service approach to increase income, reduce stigma and improve health and wellbeing for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals.
- The [Employability Partnership](#), coordinated by the [Employment Support Team](#), provides employment services and opportunities for people across Aberdeenshire to enter, sustain and progress in the labour market.
- [Fair Food Aberdeenshire](#) is a new partnership that was established in response to the development of the Aberdeenshire Food Strategy and includes a cross-sector partnership, with the aim of developing a holistic approach to tackling various food related issues. More information regarding initiatives to tackle food insecurity in Aberdeenshire is provided below.

Financial Inclusion

Current actions being undertaken by the Financial Inclusion Partnership described above include developing a cash first approach to increase food security and reduce fuel poverty. Moreover, innovative actions were employed such the provision of 10,000 Love Local cards that workers can provide to families on a low-income and offers a new way of spending locally. Furthermore, as part of a rural poverty pilot, a Money Advice Welfare Rights worker was placed in a high school.

Also critical to financial inclusion is the context with some areas of financial services and products. Recent research by [Fair By Design](#) found that 20.9% of households in the Banff and Buchan constituency are experiencing at least one component of the poverty premium, which costs households on a low income or in poverty in this area an average of £429 per year in extra costs for essential services. In Gordon and West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine these figures are just slightly lower at 17.2% and £397, and 17% and £393 respectively. Interventions that address the poverty premium can help to lessen the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis through removing these additional costs for low-income households. The [Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Action Plan 2018-22](#) identifies specific actions to address the poverty premium, which include working with businesses in the private sector to provide an interest free loans scheme to households on a low-income, and seeking funding opportunities to develop a community based and run financial institution, in partnership with existing local providers of affordable credit, to make it easier for families in poverty to access affordable credit.

Local level Participation and Engagement with Lived Experience

The [Aberdeenshire Lived Experience Network](#) (ALLEN) is made up of partners and members of the public and provides an opportunity for engagement through sharing information, views and support. There is also a [Lived Experiences Online Forum](#), which is an anonymous and solution focused platform that represents the voices of those with lived experience and priority families through participation in decisions and consultations etc. The [Aberdeenshire Youth Rights Committee](#) is made up of young people aged 12-25 and



provides an opportunity for them to raise awareness about youth poverty and inequalities issues; have their voices heard; learn about services and supports and gain accredited youth awards.

Food Insecurity

As mentioned above, [Fair Food Aberdeenshire](#) is a new partnership that are developing a sustainable food plan for Aberdeenshire. Partners include Aberdeenshire Council, NESCAN, Aberdeenshire North Foodbank, CFINE, One Seed Forward, NHS Grampian, James Hutton Institute, Buchan Poverty Hub, University of Aberdeen and the partnership are currently seeking engagement from those with lived experience.

The Aberdeenshire [Community Food Fund](#) supports community or resilience groups seeking funding to tackle food insecurity in Aberdeenshire Communities. [Cfine: Connecting with Communities](#) is a mobile food service supporting rural communities, developed in partnership with Aberdeen Council and is available in Kincardine & Mearns, Formartine, and Banff & Buchan. The Trussell Trust have foodbanks in [Aberdeenshire North](#) and [Aberdeenshire South](#).

Fuel Poverty

There are a number of current initiatives aiming to address fuel poverty in Aberdeenshire. A partnership called '*Heat & Eat*' exists between TP&I with [SCARF](#) to provide food and fuel vouchers to households with pre-paid energy metres and they supported over 400 families in 2022. From April to December 2023, SCARF's HEAT service also carried out 330 home visits across all tenures in Aberdeenshire to provide in-depth energy efficiency advice, information and support. Other initiatives include delivering energy efficiency measures to owner occupied and private landlord owned properties through Energy Efficient Scotland's Area Based Scheme; and Energy Company Obligation (ECO4), a government backed scheme for installing energy efficiency measures until March 2026, which Aberdeenshire joined in November 2023. This scheme focuses on supporting low income and vulnerable households with 84 applications processed as of February 2024. The Aberdeenshire [Fuel Poverty Project report](#) shares challenges and issues faced by those with lived experience of fuel poverty in Aberdeenshire.

Transport

There are some rural [transport schemes](#) in Aberdeenshire, and some employers run buses for employees. As described above, developing a lived experience panel with a focus on transport was a priority area for 2023 identified in the TP&I Strategy Group's 2022 annual report.

Digital Inclusion

The most recent [TP&I Strategy Group meeting minutes](#) show that digital inclusion remains a priority in Aberdeenshire. There has been a long-term project to address digital inclusion in Aberdeenshire, Digital CONNECT, but ongoing support for people to use the devices and Wi-Fi provided is needed. Improving



digital access, affordability and skills for priority families across Aberdeenshire is also identified in the 2022-2023 Aberdeenshire Local Child Poverty Action Plan.

Childcare

A deep dive into flexible childcare with the Local Voices Forum is identified as an action in the 2022-2023 Aberdeenshire Local Child Poverty Action Plan, and a childcare consultation is underway. Other childcare actions in the plan include: Developing a childcare sector-based training programme to address recruitment and retention challenges; Piloting a childcare training academy in a rural setting that delivers wrap-around childcare for primary aged children; and developing models of flexible, affordable and accessible wrap around childcare for priority families and working parents with early years, primary age children and young people who may require a higher level of care. There is also ongoing work to establish after-school clubs a few days per week.



Conclusion

It is clear to see that the challenges faced by people living in Aberdeenshire on a low income are complex and interlinked, with risks faced by households experiencing or at risk of fuel poverty an area of particular challenge. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which is hitting rural communities hardest, is increasing the pressure families are under and exacerbating the unjust marginalization faced by households at risk of hidden barriers such as the poverty premium. This is reflected in the exemplary decision by Aberdeenshire Council to extend the six priority groups of families considered at greatest risk of poverty in the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. While an array of initiatives to tackle poverty are currently underway in this large local authority area, it can be seen from the trends highlighted throughout this briefing that more resources and support are required to tackle the rural poverty premium and prevent and respond to poverty in Aberdeenshire.

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