

Soaring need for welfare funds reveals Barrhead poverty

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THERE are calls for action after the number of people in East Renfrewshire applying for emergency grants soared.

Latest statistics show there was an increase of almost 50 per cent in applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund between 2014 and 2018.

The fund helps people on low incomes through both crisis grants and community care grants.

More than 1,000 applications were made in 2018 alone and, in the first two quarters of 2019, there were 550 applications.

There was a rise of one-fifth in the number of East Renfrewshire residents applying for community care grants between 2014 and 2018, with a massive 75 per cent increase in the number applying for crisis grants.

Councillor Angela Convery, who represents Barrhead, Liboside and Uplawmoor, said: "A 75 per cent rise in people applying for crisis grants just goes to show how bad the situation is."

It is thought an increase in the number of people relying on Universal Credit has played a part in the rise in applications to the welfare fund.

“The five-week waiting time for them to receive any money to live on is just disgusting,” said Councillor Convery.

“For the majority, applying for a crisis grant is the only way for them to put food on their tables and keep themselves warm – a luxury that most of us take for granted.

In the first half of 2019, more than 200 local people applied for a community care grant, with the vast majority being accepted.

More than 300 people applied for a crisis grant in that time, with 200 being successful.

Director of the Scottish Poverty Alliance, Peter Kelly, said: “The growing numbers of people being pushed into poverty in East Renfrewshire is a direct result of decisions that have been made about our social security system, like the benefits freeze and the five-week wait for Universal Credit.

“We need a social security system that prevents people from having to access emergency support but we also need more investment in the Scottish Welfare Fund to ensure that it can meet this growing demand.”

A crisis grant is handed out if someone is in financial trouble due to a disaster such as a flood or fire, while a community care grant is designed to help people carry on living a settled life in the community.

The latter is usually given to people who are experiencing some sort of “great pressure,” such as coming out of care or imprisonment.

Renfrewshire South MSP Tom Arthur said the statistics are “deeply concerning.”

Between the start of April and end of June last year, East Renfrewshire Council spent well over £100,000 on handing out the two grants.

East Renfrewshire has approved almost 5,400 grant applications since 2013, when the scheme was launched.

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