

Edinburgh Trade Union Council

Submission to the Policy and Sustainability Committee of the City of Edinburgh Council which meets on Thursday 14th May 2020

Edinburgh Covid Issues - Democratic Deficit of the City Council

Edinburgh Trade Union Council wished to communicate its concerns to the City of Edinburgh Council. We would have liked to have had a 'virtual' deputation to the Committee meeting on Thursday. In addition to a written submission we had hoped that we would have been able to ask questions about our concerns and engage in a dialogue with the Councillors on Committee. We have serious concerns about the democratic deficit of the Council in dealing with a range of crises produced by the Covid 19 pandemic. The Council is failing to inform the public of these crises and consult with the public about how these crises are being managed, and will be managed over the coming months. We believe that these crises can only be managed with public cooperation and support. We are going to raise our concerns about 3 particular crises although there are more.

We realise that the Council has its own liaison, negotiation and consultation protocols with the trade unions representing their own employees. We are not necessarily expressing concerns of the Council employees. We are expressing the concerns of all the the trade union movement in Edinburgh. These concerns, as reflected in this submission, have been drawn together by the Covid 19 Committee which Edinburgh TUC established. This Committee has over 50 participants.

We hope that the Committee will read our submission. We would be happy to virtually meet with Councillors to discuss our concerns in more detail.

Democratic Deficit

Despite the serious nature of the crises that the Council is managing it seems reluctant to inform or involve the public. We understand that the meeting on Thursday will be the only meeting in May at which it will be possible to have a 'deputation'. Of course a written submission is not a substitute for a deputation and should not be called a deputation, The

essence of a deputation is the potential for a dialogue with our elected representatives - the people who make the decisions. Edinburgh TUC has been offered a virtual meeting with senior Council officials to discuss our concerns. While such a meeting would have its value it is not the same as a meeting with the actual decision makers. We wish meeting(s) with Councillor leaders.

We understand that important decisions are in the process of being made in May of which the public and the wider local trade union movement are more or less unaware. We think that this is a serious mistake and needs to be rectified. The three crises that we wish to refer to in order for our concerns to be illustrated are:

- 1. Poverty/ Child Poverty In Edinburgh**
- 2. The Future of Lothian Buses**
- 3. The future of Social Care Provision**

Child Poverty/ Poverty in Edinburgh

The information that we have received from our affiliates is that poverty has sharply increased since the start of the lockdown. It will continue to increase for the rest of the year.

Child Poverty was at an unacceptable level in Edinburgh before the lockdown. Since the lockdown we understand that the availability of the meal provided by Breakfast Clubs in schools has dropped by over 90%. The number of food parcels provided by the Council to school families and their children is not sufficient to deal with the poverty that existed before the lockdown.

The number of parcels takes no account of the new Poverty that has arisen since the lockdown either because people are being furloughed and only getting 80% of their wages or because people have become dependent on an inadequate and unfair system of Universal Credit. We understand that the need for Food Banks has grown through the City. New Food Banks have been set up. We understand that Edinburgh Food Banks are not getting the amount of food that they need to meet demand.

There are media reports that the lockdown has generated a rise of mental health conditions amongst parents and school children. This is linked to the risen poverty.

It is a serious issue now and will continue once schools have resumed. The City Council and the Health Service will require additional resources.

The local trade union movement would like to know what the Council is doing to deal with the new, higher, level of Poverty in Edinburgh. We wish to know its plans for the rest of 2020. We wish to know if the Council is and will be doing enough. We want to know if the Scottish Government is or will be making the resources available to deal with Poverty in our City. We are sure that the Council will not have the resources itself because of the drop in its income (supposedly a 'black hole' of £50 million)

The Future of Lothian Buses

We understand that Lothian Buses has suffered a 90% drop in fares which will affect the income of the Council (in dividends from the local authority owned company) . Most of the bus drivers have been furloughed. It seems that a reduced bus service will continue for some time. As the lockdown is relaxed more people will be allowed on a bus but a bus will only be able to take a fraction of the number it used to. How is the Council going to inform the public of the new social distancing requirements and the reduced capacity of buses? How is it going to guarantee the health and safety of passengers and staff? What are the Council's thoughts about the future of the service and the future of the bus drivers who provided the service? How is the Council going to guarantee that people can get to work? What is the Scottish Government saying about the future of the service and is it going to cover the losses to the Council of a reduced service?

The future of Social Care Provision

The impact of the pandemic on non publicly owned social care provision in the City, as elsewhere in the UK, has been distressing. There have been too many preventable deaths due to the lack of Personal Protective Equipment, due to poor training and poor procedures and the lack of experience in keeping buildings and homes clean. A month after the trade unions were urging the authorities to provide a sufficient supply of PPE to all care homes (not just Council owned homes) a sufficient supply has only now been made available. This is not the case yet for those care workers who support their clients in their own homes. It seems from what we have read that homes and services operated by the private sector have a worse record of infection and deaths. Many of these private sector

services have local authority contracts. It needs to be explained why the Council was unable to enforce good health and safety and barrier nursing in the places where it had contracts.

We read today that a private sector employer in Edinburgh, Randolph Hill, are appealing for volunteers, on their website, to staff their care homes. This is because too many staff are off because they have underlying conditions, or their families have underlying conditions, or people are off for social isolation reasons. There is a shortage of agency workers. The advert does not mention the requirement for volunteers to be part of the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme nor does it say who will pay for registration.

Why cannot the Council ensure, in the current ongoing crisis, that care homes are fully staffed with paid, experienced, trained and tested staff? Why does a frontline service of vulnerable people have to rely on untested and untrained volunteers?

Summary

Edinburgh Trade Union Council sincerely hopes that the City Council will resolve its democratic deficit by, as a matter of urgency, fully informing the public of how it is dealing with the many aspects of the pandemic crisis that is affecting Edinburgh. We hope it will fully consult with the public. Where the Council does not have the resources to deal with a crisis we hope it is making a case, on behalf of the people of Edinburgh, for support from the Scottish Government.

We hope the Council will move quickly to setting up virtual meetings at which deputations can have a dialogue with Councillors.

Des Loughney

Secretary,

Edinburgh Trade Union Council

13th May 2020.