



# Poverty and Coronavirus in Edinburgh

## Interim Report

May 2020

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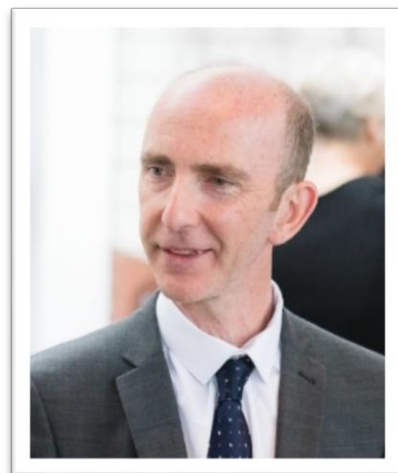
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# Foreword

The pandemic has created a fast-rising tide of anxiety and insecurity. For those who were already struggling on a low-income, life is now harder still, and we are seeing a new surge of unemployed people at risk of being swept into poverty.

The initial government response has offered a lifeline to many employers, charities and families. City of Edinburgh Council and community partners moved quickly to put in place support that will allow many people in the city to keep their heads above water. New relationships have formed, people have responded with compassion to those affected directly by the virus and by keyworkers keeping essential support going. There is the potential to build public and political will to achieve a just transition from where we are now.



It is right that we think in bold terms about how Edinburgh can return to activity safely, generating the good jobs, affordable housing and income security that too many citizens have been locked out of. We cannot hope to do that well unless we listen to people's experiences now and understand the hardship and heartache they face.

This interim report is not the one we expected to publish. After fifteen months of connecting with people and organisations across the city, we planned to publish a shared view of how to end poverty in Edinburgh. Everything we learned from those conversations has been banked. We are clearer than ever about the principles and values that should guide the city's actions – and we will set out the material and relational changes needed for the long-term in our final report in the autumn. We will also share our ideas for establishing a new network led by people with direct experience of poverty, alongside civic allies. In the weeks since lockdown began, we have gone back to many of our partners to learn about the impacts they are seeing. This report tries to do justice to what we have heard. Alongside fear and isolation, there is an upsurge of community support and kindness. Alongside unprecedented government support, there are gaps leaving too many people struggling. Alongside an extraordinary effort to house people who were sleeping rough and to protect tenants from eviction, there are unanswered questions about arrears and debts. We are all facing the same storm, but we are in different boats.

Putting this right requires that everyone has a stake in what happens next in Edinburgh. We can redesign support, services and the city economy. The scale of the challenge for planning and long-term budgets needs to be recognised openly and honestly. Where a return to business as usual would see the gains from this crisis unravel, we must change the rules of procurement, eligibility and evaluation. Enabling people to secure fair work will be crucial in overcoming the financial knock and the emotional trauma many have faced. We must address with urgency the gaps in support which have left those in precarious hospitality and construction jobs and many of the self-employed with reduced hours or no earnings.

Employers and housing providers have as much responsibility in making a just transition happen as governments, councils and charities. In the coming weeks, we will tune in to citizen experiences, seek out unheard views and develop potential solutions alongside communities. And you can connect with us through Twitter [@EndPovertyEdin](https://twitter.com/EndPovertyEdin), through our website [www.edinburghpovertycommission.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.edinburghpovertycommission.org.uk/get-involved), or by emailing us at [strategyandinsight@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:strategyandinsight@edinburgh.gov.uk).

**Dr Jim McCormick**  
Chair of Edinburgh Poverty Commission

# Introduction

**Edinburgh Poverty Commission** is an independent group working together to define the steps we need to take to end poverty in Edinburgh. Ahead of publishing our final report in the Autumn, we have been listening to people and organisations in Edinburgh over the past few weeks to consider the profound impacts of the Covid-19 emergency on people living in poverty, now and in the future.

This interim report of the Commission presents the testimony and evidence we have gathered, together with the principles and insights formed over the last 15 months of our inquiry, and sets forward actions, new and continued, that will be required as the city begins a process of rebuilding.

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It's a terrifying time for a lot of people. What's the new normal going to be? The crisis has highlighted how many people live anyway. My hope is that some of the people now having a tough time will think to themselves: is this how much people have to live on normally? When this is over, we need to say: a large proportion of the city's people won't be getting back on their feet because we live in a really unequal city and now it's time to fix it. How the city responds on jobs and incomes, to back the normal person, is key.

**Chris Kilkenny**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

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This is not just an Edinburgh story. We have learning and insight from our work in Edinburgh that is important for everyone in the UK to hear and to act on.

**Sandy MacDonald**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

## Edinburgh Poverty Commission

Edinburgh Poverty Commission was launched in November 2018 and over 15 months met 6 times in full session. During that period, we have held 100 evidence sessions and project visits, met and heard from over 70 local organisations, commissioned significant new research into the experience

of citizens living on low incomes and attitudes to poverty across the city and in total heard from more than 1,000 individual participants.

In the midst of drafting our final report in March this year the lockdown to limit the impact of Covid-19 was imposed and we realised over the days immediately following that everything had changed. As we came to terms with what the restrictions to normal life and measures put in place to support individuals and organisations would mean for us in our personal and working lives, we realised there would be profound impacts for people living in poverty.

We decided to delay publishing our final report until the autumn and in the meantime to connect with many of the people and organisations we have engaged with over the last fifteen months to hear what was happening across the city, to listen to concerns, fears and hopes and reflect on what this means for poverty in Edinburgh, now and in the future.

It is important to recognise that the testimony that follows is not a comprehensive survey of citizens or picture of the vast effort of many organisations to support individuals and communities. Individual experience and named organisations provide an illustration of wider issues and the response across the city.

The picture of poverty in Edinburgh is distinctive. In the wealthiest city in Scotland (second only to London in the UK) an estimated 80,000 people live in poverty, including almost 1 in 4 children. The gap between the rich and poor is wider in Edinburgh than anywhere else in Scotland. The city has enormous housing wealth alongside an affordable housing crisis, reflected in the long average stays in temporary accommodation. Someone living in New Town West can expect to live 21 years longer than someone living in Niddrie House. The inequality gap makes the position worse for people in poverty – Edinburgh does better than the national average for school pupils living in the least deprived areas and worse for those living in the most deprived. The majority of people in poverty live in households where at least one person is in employment, and people live in poverty in even the most affluent areas of this city.<sup>1</sup>

## The response so far

The measures put in place to mitigate the worst effects of economic hardship by the UK and Scottish Governments and the City of Edinburgh Council have been undeniably bold and focused on providing support to those who need help most. At the same time the response of voluntary, third sector, and community groups across the city has been overwhelming, with hundreds of groups working together to make sure food, medical supplies, support and advice reach the people who need it.



Over 100 Covid-19 support services are listed and promoted through the EVOC website, providing access to food, financial assistance, crisis support, or help with social isolation.<sup>2</sup>

A comprehensive list of all responses made in Edinburgh to date would be far too long to include in this report, but some of the most significant measures from the point of view of people in poverty have included:

- Responses from UK and Scottish Governments to help businesses keep people in employment during the lockdown, including the Job Retention Scheme and other business support funding packages.
- Responses from Governments at all levels to increase the value and availability of key social security benefits – including uplifts to the adult element of Universal Credit, the Local Housing Allowance, and the expansion of funding for Scottish Welfare Fund and Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- Measures to reassure tenants that no evictions can take place during this emergency, and responses from City of Edinburgh Council to house rough sleepers, and ensure safe places are available for homeless households.<sup>3</sup>
- Other measures taken by the Council to establish local resilience centres for those who are facing serious hardship during the crisis, to make direct payments every fortnight to the bank accounts of parents with children who receive free school meals, to work with EVOC and other partners to organise local food distribution networks delivering thousands of emergency food parcels across the city, and making thousands of outreach calls to households who are shielding or otherwise in need of support.<sup>4 5</sup>
- The huge efforts and commitment from third sector and voluntary groups across all areas of the city to not only change their ways of working – providing support online, through door knocking and through telephone outreach to people who might need support – but also to create new services and new partnerships to make sure food, financial help, medicines or other supports are delivered where they are needed.
- The responses from funding organisations from all sectors, many of whom have provided much needed flexibility and additional support to make sure critical community organisations in the city can continue to operate and to adapt.

We know that these responses have already helped thousands of people in Edinburgh who are struggling to cope with the effects of this emergency, both on their health and their livelihoods. But we know too that these represent only the first stage of a response to this crisis which is still

developing in ways that are difficult to predict. And we know that there are gaps and delays in some support and still challenges in ensuring people know how to access help if they cannot do so online.

For Edinburgh to make the strongest possible steps to prevent the coronavirus from deepening the poverty and inequalities we know already exist in the city, the next steps we take will be even more important than those we have already begun to put in place. The testimony and evidence we have gathered over the past few weeks must be an important part of designing that response. This paper gives a summary of what we have heard from citizens and organisations who have experienced this first phase of response and, together with the principles and insights gathered from the last 15 months of our Edinburgh Poverty Commission inquiry, sets forward actions, new and continued, that will be required as the city begins a process of rebuilding.

## Testimony from Edinburgh citizens and organisations

Speaking to citizens and those in organisations providing support over the last month the overriding sense is of the fear in which people are living. We can all relate to the anxiety we feel for the health of our loved ones and in fact people we don't know as we imagine the stories behind the numbers reported daily. Above all else we worry about the seeming lottery of life and death. We also all share experiences of the daily challenges presented by staying at home: missing family and friends, home schooling and keeping kids busy or struggling to find ways to fill the day, loneliness or managing relationships with those we share our homes with.

**For those already struggling to get by on a low income there are significant additional pressures to life in lockdown and the current crisis has exacerbated many of the injustices we have identified over the last fifteen months. In addition, the lockdown has revealed just how precarious large parts of our economy are with people on low incomes being pulled into further hardship, and a new surge of unemployed people at risk of being swept into poverty.**

For many people the experience of poverty comes as a rising tide of circumstances over which they have little control. Life events such as relationship break downs, job losses or poor health can pull almost anyone into poverty at some point in their life.

Coronavirus is making more people than ever vulnerable to these shocks, and emphasising the need for powerful support systems to help people stay afloat.<sup>6</sup>



## Testimony: Jobs and incomes

Evidence shows that huge numbers of people in the city have lost or are at risk of losing their jobs. Many of those who have lost their job have never claimed out-of-work benefits, do not know where to get help, and are struggling with the delay in receiving Universal Credit payments. Turn2Us who provide grants to individuals from the Edinburgh Trust are seeing a huge increase in demand but also worry that many who need help will not know about all the available sources of help. Community Renewal, who run one of the city's employability programmes has seen an increase in referrals from 20-30 per month to 120 in the first month since the lockdown began. They recognise the way in which many have lost their jobs as a significant trauma – described as brutal, people feeling they have been treated as disposable. While immediate concerns are focused on getting through this period of lockdown, for many the fear of the impact of unemployment and unmanageable debt in coming months is very real.

### Unemployment and benefits

- Scottish unemployment expected to more than double...which could mean an additional 13,000 people unemployed in Edinburgh during 2020<sup>7</sup>
- 23% of UK businesses have paused or ceased trading, while 29% are 'not sure' their business has the financial resources to survive this crisis<sup>8</sup>
- 1,200 Scottish Welfare Fund applications per week in Edinburgh since lockdown began – 3 times the usual average<sup>9</sup>
- Universal Credit claims at peak were up by eight to nine times the volume immediately pre-crisis, while the number of advance payments peaked at five to six times the pre-crisis number<sup>10</sup>

### Impact on incomes

- More than half of all households believe they will struggle to meet their financial commitments during this crisis<sup>11</sup>
- 64% of those in serious financial difficulty are renters, 31% are homeowners<sup>12</sup>
- 1 in 5 have already used credit to pay for food and other expenses<sup>13</sup>



## Impact by

- Workers who are low earners, women, parents, and young people are most likely to be exposed to loss of income and increased health risk during this crisis<sup>14</sup>
- People on low incomes are 2.4 times more likely to work in shutdown sectors, than higher earners<sup>15</sup>
- 23% of women work in shutdown sectors, compared to 16% of men<sup>16</sup>
- 16-24-year-olds workers are twice as likely to be working in shutdown sectors as the rest of the workforce<sup>17</sup>
- Nearly half of all people on zero-hours contracts work in shutdown sectors<sup>18</sup>
- Two-thirds of working single parents are in jobs bearing the greatest economic and health risks in this crisis<sup>19</sup>
- Young black, Asian and ethnic minority workers are significantly more likely to be exposed to the economic effects of this crisis. Such workers are 47% more likely to be on a zero hours contract and less likely to have a permanent contract than their white peer group.<sup>20</sup>
- UK BAME groups are also at a significantly higher risk of developing and dying from coronavirus, account for 34% of critically ill Covid-19 patients and a similar percentage of all Covid-19 cases<sup>21</sup>
- Evidence from England shows that coronavirus has had a proportionally higher impact on health in the most deprived areas, with death rates in those areas more than double the rate recorded in affluent areas.<sup>22</sup>

Many self-employed people have also lost their source of income overnight and found they are not covered by UK Government support. Whilst the UK Government has acted relatively quickly to address the main gaps and the Scottish Government too has stepped in to confirm support for new starters in 2019-20 who aren't otherwise eligible, there are still significant problems. Too many people, for example taxi drivers, are left with no income as they wait for the UK Government self-employed scheme to open for applications in June. For many in this category this will be their first experience of unemployment and navigating an unfamiliar social security system and the stress of their situation cannot be underestimated.

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I have been overwhelmed by the number of people who are traumatised by this situation. I am meeting people who have been in work all their lives who suddenly find themselves having to navigate the benefits system for the first time... not knowing their rights, not knowing where to go for support.

**Mary Alexander**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

Feedback also indicates that many employers are not taking up the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme. For many with insufficient business resilience the support is not comprehensive enough to allow them to retain staff. Others do not have confidence in their position to provide employment when we return to activity and some simply assume it will be overly complicated to apply and easier just to lay people off and recruit again when business picks up. In particular, many agency staff are being let go as neither agency nor employer take responsibility for including them in the job retention scheme for which they are eligible.

For the low paid who have continued to work through the crisis providing vital services, there have been huge concerns about safety with inadequate provision of personal protective equipment and insufficient changes made to working practices to allow social distancing.

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The system should be saying to people: if you're going to go to work during the pandemic and take a risk for us, we'll pick up the risk and secure you. You won't have to worry about money going up and down and worrying about how the rent will be paid. You'll have certainty. There's money in too many different pots. How do people access what's there? It ends up with us having to hand out the phone number for the Scottish Welfare Fund to the whole street due to the long wait to get paid Universal Credit.

**Chris Kilkenny**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

Looking at the statistics and listening to testimony the overriding sense is of the injustice of the impact of the lockdown. We have all been asked to make sacrifices during lockdown to save lives and protect the NHS, but a disproportionate share of that sacrifice is being made by the poorest people in our society. In particular, too many employers in the city have not taken sufficient responsibility for their people as many have failed to pass on the security afforded them by the state. In these circumstances it is the low paid, those on temporary contracts and those on zero-hour contracts who are disproportionately suffering as a result. The immediate crisis comes on top of a situation where we know many people are exhausted physically and emotionally, having severely restricted options about how to manage living costs, are unable to plan and barely have enough to survive, despite being in work. The crisis shines a light on the fragility and inherent injustice in our economy.

## Testimony: Housing and homelessness

Some of the first and most compassionate responses to the crisis were seen in steps taken to support those people experiencing some of the most severe forms of poverty. The City of Edinburgh Council acted quickly to provide security for those in temporary accommodation and to house rough sleepers securing over 200 bedspaces in hotels and private flats<sup>23</sup>. Five Resilience Centres were established across the city to make sure anyone who becomes homeless, or needs an emergency cash payment during lockdown, can receive face to face support in a way that is safe. So far, those centres have supported over 1,000 citizens in the first four weeks since lockdown began<sup>24</sup>.

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The opportunity for homeless people to be housed in hotels has been one of the best things to happen during this crisis. It could be a transformational new start for some people.

**Diana Noel-Paton**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

In addition to that, the first weeks of the crisis saw promises from the Council and social landlords that no one will be made homeless because of rent arrears during this emergency, as well as Scottish Government legislation to ensure no evictions could legally be made from any tenure or landlord during the lockdown. These steps are all welcome, but we have still heard real concern from people who remain anxious about paying their rent and their ability to maintain their tenancy. Not least they express fears that this period will simply become one of storing up debt for the future with little chance of being able to earn enough to get back on to an even keel when we can return to activity. And we have similarly heard concerns about what happens to those many homeless households when the lockdown ends, when hotels return to normal activity, and when the budgets being used to support them are stretched even more than ever.

## Testimony: Food, the cost of living and social isolation

The immediate priority for most in the last month has been food. While those comfortably off save money staying at home, the cost of living has risen significantly for those in poverty as they are forced to buy what one supermarket has to offer because of limited scope to travel. Additionally, many in poverty have had difficulty shopping for a range of reasons including shopping less frequently without a car, disability, carers being unable to shop with the people they care for as only one person is being allowed in at a time, single parents with several children finding it difficult to shop with them and to buy enough to feed their family with restrictions on the numbers of some

items. While most of us have experienced anxiety or frustration with queuing and had to adjust the way we shop and eat, for people living in poverty these stresses have often been extreme.

City of Edinburgh Council acted quickly to ensure the families of children receiving free school meals got the equivalent money in their bank accounts. This provides a payment of £22.50 per entitled child made fortnightly during lockdown, with almost 5,500 payments made at the last count in late April<sup>25</sup>. This support was extended throughout holiday periods as well as during term time, representing a very welcome example of how the crisis has stimulated improvements for citizens that we would expect to see continue once this emergency period is over.

For the majority of families, this 'cash first' approach is the most dignified way of support, providing certainty and choice. However, many families still struggle with the logistics of feeding their families. Organisations across the city are stepping in to make sure food reaches the people who need it, including some groups who have shifted their purpose, so they are able to support people with their most immediate priorities. LIFT in North Edinburgh immediately focused on providing food for as many families as possible to enable them to stay at home, reacting to the fear and distress they heard from the people they work with in the community. In the first week of the lockdown alone, with volunteer support and food supplied by Social Bite, Cyrenians, and direct from a number of restaurants, they were able to keep 400 families fed.

Increased fuel costs due to needing heating on for longer periods are another significant concern for those living in poverty. And, while some have experienced support from energy providers others are continuing to have to go out several times a week to top up pre-payment cards at a PayPoint.

People have expressed huge concerns about the impact of current circumstances on mental health. Loneliness and isolation, loss of independence, impact of furlough and unemployment, the stigma of claiming benefits and using foodbanks, managing conflict in relationships at home have all surfaced in conversations over the last few weeks and contribute to the significant distress witnessed by organisations who are providing support in our communities. Where most of us are experiencing increased neighbourly connection and support there is concern for those without digital devices or the skills to use them effectively and the places where neighbourly support is harder.

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I have serious concerns about young people and men who are at risk of suicide since the lockdown came into force. My own opinion is it has to be highlighted and is there enough being done for them to reach out to the mental health services which I do understand is stretched to the limit? Could there be more adverts and free phone numbers for them to contact people who can help them?

**Betty Stevenson**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member



## Testimony: Co-ordinating the response

The picture that has emerged from talking to a range of organisations providing immediate support is not primarily one of a lack of food or resources to help during the lockdown but rather a continuing challenge of co-ordination. It seems likely that if you are already known to a local (statutory or third sector) organisation then you will be able to access food, connections, and a route to other support you might need. We know, however, that even in normal circumstances people struggle to find support with all the issues which are relevant to them and there is concern for huge and increasing numbers experiencing hardship who are not connected to local support organisations – and do not know where to get help. To a lesser extent, there are also concerns over the potential for duplication of effort amongst a range of organisations. It is also clear that, as we return to activity, resources to support people who have lost their jobs and are struggling to get by on drastically reduced incomes will continue to be needed on an unprecedented scale.

We know there have been huge efforts to co-ordinate based on the reach of the statutory sector and the local connections of voluntary organisations, but we also hear testimony that there are gaps, too much reliance on fragile organisations and a continuing lack of clarity about who is doing what.

It is clear that where it is happening people are reliant on and highly value the lifeline support provided through organisations and people they know and trust in their community, but not everyone who desperately needs help has those connections and the strength of those local organisations and networks is not evenly spread across the city.

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It is important we recognise the hugely impressive response of the third sector... but this crisis has also highlighted the hollowing out of support present in some communities over recent years.

**Celia Tennant**

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

Similar challenges around co-ordination relate to the reach of funding being made available by Scottish Government and other funders. Feedback from organisations providing support to those in poverty highlights variable experiences in this first period since lockdown began. Some have been quick to ask for and secure grant funding from the Scottish Government and independent funders, or in some cases have been given new money with an encouragement to use it for whatever is most immediately required. Other organisations have had less capacity to access funding. While some organisations have shifted their purpose quickly to respond to immediate need and have made their own decisions about risk to themselves and volunteers to provide vital services, others have had less confidence and felt a lack of clarity from government in relaxing the usual rules shaping their activity.

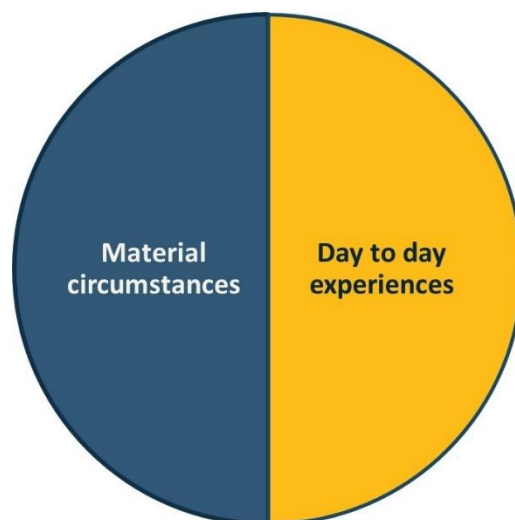
# Principles

As we have listened we have increasingly realised that while so much has changed in a few short weeks, much of what we are seeing now is a magnification of what we had previously observed, both in the factors which exacerbate the difficulty of living on a low income but also in the hope and potential for change.

We had already recognised that the change required to end poverty in Edinburgh would be as much about changing the day to day experience of interactions, connections and relationships between individuals and organisations and within communities as concrete change to material circumstances.

We are clear that as well as more money in their pocket, reduced living costs and better living conditions and improved prospects to get on with their lives, people need interactions, connections and relationships based on understanding, kindness, dignity and respect. Rather than being shunted from pillar to post through complicated networks and systems, they need help that enables them to take control of their own life, that helps with all the issues which matter to them.

We had agreed the following principles:



- We do not accept poverty is inevitable
- People who are struggling are supported to move out of poverty quickly, take control of their lives, and contribute to a city where people look after each other
- We design and deliver workable solutions alongside people who experience poverty
- We use all the power we have in the city in our organisations and communities to directly effect change within the city and build the public and political will for change needed at national level
- We do not merely mitigate the worst effects, we end poverty

It seems all the clearer now, following the experience of the last month, that lasting solutions to end poverty will have to be built together, in connections and relationships and in shared humanity. We need to ensure that the growing understanding of shared hardship, respect and value for largely low paid key workers and those instincts which many of us are witnessing in the reaching out of neighbours, connection with strangers in the street and the surge in volunteering are harnessed rather than merely observed and allowed to recede. As we rebuild, we should redesign our economy

and services, not on independent twin tracks but tied together around our core humanity and shared values which are perhaps more evident now than they have ever been. **We need to build on the compassion we are witnessing every day to create a just transition towards a city that is effective in ending poverty.**

## Actions

At the heart of our proposed actions to end poverty (based on our work over the last fifteen months) is the need for: **The right support in the places we live.**

Living in poverty grinds people down and too often the attitudes and experiences they encounter trying to get help or just function day to day make their situation even worse.

People have told us they feel they are not listened to, are not treated with dignity, respect and kindness. They are forced to tell their story numerous times to deal with all the issues they need help with. They are referred, assessed and referred on again. Help with one specific problem can fail because it is set in the context of multiple issues which are not addressed together and at worst help in one area precludes help in another. Often the help people may need to address the emotional toll of their situation is ignored.

We believe Edinburgh needs to:

- Ensure people in all parts of the city have local, safe, welcoming community spaces where they can access the right support for them and make progress at the right pace.
- Give permission to staff at the frontline to make meaningful connections and support them to enable relational approaches, removing over-reliance on procedural and rule bound approaches.
- Enable staff from a range of services to work together to support people with all the issues that are relevant to them, removing the need to negotiate numerous and complex referral systems.
- Ensure support enables people to take control of their lives.

This feels equally relevant in current circumstances. While welcoming community spaces are not possible in a physical sense for now and the connections cannot be face to face, many organisations are telling us just how much people need a trusted relationship to access support. We believe the right support sits at the heart of our approach **now**, as we **return to activity** and as we **rebuild**, with priorities which shift in each of those phases.

As we move through those phases, ensuring people have the right support in the places they live will mean a **fundamental shift in the way in which we plan, fund, deliver and evaluate services across the public and third sectors**. Alongside that shift in delivery of services we need to ensure we **lock in any progress being made to alleviate poverty now**, influence Scottish and UK Governments to **rebuild a fairer economy** and crucially **make it both possible and unavoidable for employers to play a full and active role in tackling poverty**.

## Actions: Now

Government at all levels has acted quickly to address the impact that lockdown has on people's jobs and livelihoods. But the full potential of Government schemes to protect employment will fail if employers cannot, or choose not to, take it up.

We need Government to respond quickly to the concerns of businesses and **address problems with the design and coverage of support schemes to make sure take up prevents avoidable redundancies**.

And we need business organisations, local Government, and Government agencies to **act now to help, and in some cases pressure, employers to take up the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme. It should only be unwound gradually, when employers and workers have confidence that it is being done safely**.

The most urgent need currently is **connecting people who need help with the support they need to stay afloat**. We need a systematic approach to identification of those who need help and clear, well-advertised and accessible routes for people to seek support. The City of Edinburgh Council website provides useful email and telephone contacts for support (which would helpfully be replicated in leaflet form) as does the Scottish Government leaflet delivered to all citizens. It is also welcome that schools, community groups, and statutory services are phoning people to proactively offer help and assistance. Many of the organisations we have spoken to note the need for a trusted relationship to navigate what can be a complex picture of available support.

In providing routes to support we must also be careful that we do not limit our use of 'vulnerability' to mean solely those at risk of illness or in need of care. We are seeing long established but also new patterns of people experiencing vulnerability due to a wide range of circumstances. As the lockdown and the impact of this crisis continues, it is important that the focus of support is broad enough to capture all those people struggling in or falling into poverty who desperately need help now – many of whom may not be known to, or familiar with, support networks in the city.

Alongside systematic identification of need, we must see continued effort to achieve effective coordination of resources, organisations and volunteers who can provide support, responding to the issues which are relevant to different people. As far as possible we should provide that support through one point of contact, a trusted relationship, either already existing or invested in now. This



clearly requires a mix of statutory and third sector organisations and there is no one sector or organisation which can manage this on their own. The scale of the challenge in coordinating the response at local level reflects pre Covid-19 issues in the hollowing out of funding over the last decade and over reliance on fragmented third sector organisations. It is all the clearer now, in crisis, that all organisations in the city need to work together in a way that is planned, comprehensive, transparent, builds on strengths and responds to the voices of communities.

National and local government, agencies and organisations should **give clear permission to staff to make meaningful connections** and respond to need flexibly, balancing the risk of not acting against the usual approaches to eligibility criteria, risk assessment, accepted activity and performance management. There is clear evidence that this is happening already but confidence among organisations is variable.

While lockdown continues the **most pressing issue is to ensure that people have food**. There is no shortage of food in the system. The main issue is responding to need in the most appropriate way. For some, who can shop, money is the most dignified approach. For others, who are struggling to shop, direct delivery is more helpful.

Although perhaps less pressing as the weather improves, we need to ensure people are able to keep their homes warm without **fear of being unable to pay for fuel** and that all people can move to safe methods of payment - for example being able to top up meters by phone or on-line rather than use of PayPoints and being able to access hardship support via energy companies.

Help with applications for **social security entitlements and other financial support needs** to sit in the frontline response. People need one point of contact who can help them navigate their entitlements, support them through bureaucracy and for many, the trauma of losing work in the midst of crisis. Throughout the last year of our inquiry we have seen a number of local organisations playing exactly this role, providing a single trusted relationship to help people find the support they need. During the lockdown period projects such as Maximise!, CHAI, LIFT, and others have made great strides to shift their ways of working to make sure those relationships can still be there for people when they need them.

Many of us are struggling with **home schooling and activities for children**. Living in poverty intensifies those issues, for example having less space, no outdoor space, fewer or no digital devices, fewer books, toys and games and for many a range of pressures which makes it difficult to support children's learning or simply to have fun with them. Many organisations are responding to this need and providing resources to help families learn and have fun is a key priority in surviving lockdown.

**Enabling human connections is vital**. We are rediscovering how much we need each other as neighbours reach out to each other, strangers stop to chat, at a distance, and we use digital technology like never before to maintain relationships with family and friends. Not everyone is able to make those connections. For some the barrier is not having digital devices or skills and we need to make sure everyone has that possibility. There are already lots of fantastic examples of online groups and activities bringing people together. Organisations like Grassmarket Community Project and Working Rite have responded to this period by not only continuing to support their communities, but also invent new ways of connecting people and building relationships – be it through online classes, or meditation sessions, or activities for families. We need to ensure that

these trusted relationships and social connections are recognised as a vital element of the frontline response to supporting people.

The one issue we have heard above almost anything else over the past 15 months of our inquiry has been evidence on the **intolerable toll of poverty on people's mental health**. In current circumstances, those pressures are magnified and exacerbated by isolation. In fact, many organisations are recognising the experience of lockdown as a significant collective trauma. To deal with that trauma people need help with the material circumstances that cause stress and they need to feel they are listened to and treated with dignity, respect and kindness. Where they also need specific specialist mental health support, it is important we ensure that those services are provided and co-ordinated within the context of much broader support that recognises and addresses the social and economic causes and consequences of poor mental health.

## Actions: Return to Activity

The impact of this crisis on unemployment and economic activity in this city is set to be unprecedented. We are not likely to see the full scale of impact for another 2 to 3 months and while, for now efforts are clearly focused on keeping people safe and well at home, the focus will shift quickly to addressing economic hardship. No matter what course this crisis takes over the coming months, **we need to ensure that measures which have been put in place to support people through the lockdown period are not lifted prematurely** and in particular people are helped effectively to manage debt which has stored up.

**Employers have a responsibility like never before to look after their people.** Enabling people to return to (or continue in) fair work, not just any work, will be crucial in overcoming both the financial knock many individuals and families will have taken but also the emotional trauma. We must address with urgency the anomalies which have left large groups of people, particularly those in precarious work in hospitality and construction sectors and many of the self-employed, with reduced hours or no earnings. We must also improve the working conditions of key workers who have kept the city operating, perhaps most crucially the care workers who have put their life in danger daily with insufficient personal protection and testing for so little in return. The expansion of real Living Wage coverage for adult social care workers, backdated to the start of April, is a welcome start in appropriately valuing those who provide care in our communities. For those who have worked through this crisis and those who haven't we may not see the toll of the trauma for some time and employers need to be prepared to support people suffering with stress and enable recovery. The city's approach needs to engage fully with workplaces as well as communities, the third sector as well as core public services.

High housing costs in Edinburgh present a particular problem making it likely that many will not be able to afford rent, even with the welcome changes to Local Housing Allowance. **We must lock in the gains which have been made in providing security for those in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping.** Significant steps have been made during this emergency for people facing the most severe forms of poverty, but the fundamental pressures of Edinburgh's housing system have not changed. Commitment of new resources and ambition is needed to ensure that these gains can be sustained once this phase of the outbreak is over.

As lockdown measures are lifted, we should continue to focus on **the right support at a local level**. We should build on existing relationships and those contacts made through the emergency response with people in need of support, beginning to widen out the scope of the dialogue with individuals and communities beyond their concerns with just surviving, towards what will be needed to enable them to be thriving and contributing. For example, Community Renewal has made contact with LIFT with a view to engaging with the people they are working with on employability in months to come

We need to **strengthen the connections that have already been made and work to bring the third and statutory sectors closer and indeed business wherever possible, building on the local resilience hubs to enable us to shape genuinely holistic support across all needs**. For example, the Go Beyond network has worked hard to bring together third sector organisations in South West Edinburgh and WorkingRite, who have shifted rapidly from youth employability activities to supporting families with food and establishing links with other organisations to provide activities for children. We need to provide support across multiple needs not just those arising through this crisis, based on trusted relationships but crucially also designed to be systematic and leave no one behind. We are not suggesting the heavy lifting is done solely by the third sector but that we begin to systematically shift the way in which public sector resources are deployed to work at a local level.

Alongside holding on to a more local approach to service delivery as we emerge from lockdown, we need to **build on shifts in culture** which have begun to happen and are essential in our ability to shift to person centred, holistic support based on trusted relationships. Where permission has been clearly given, we will see increasing examples of what can happen where staff operating at the frontline have confidence to connect, to respond to need flexibly and make judgements borne of humanity rather than procedure. We must not lose that humanity. We should collect those examples and begin to systematically assess what they mean for our pre crisis ways of working. Where a return to business as usual would stifle the value, which has been created we must not return and instead begin to change those rules – in procurement, eligibility criteria, measurement, and performance management.

We must **provide a reason and a structure to enable the groundswell of volunteers who have been moved to give at a scale we have not previously seen to continue to contribute to community**.

Many people are discovering their generosity of spirit and despite difficult circumstances the joy of a different way of living, less focused on the workplace, more focused on the people closest to them. That purpose and structure will come from connections and relationships with others and involvement in shaping the way we live, rather than being bounded by a set tasks for which the need will recede.

## Actions: Rebuilding

The full economic impact of the crisis is not likely to be seen for several months. The impact particularly on tourism and hospitality will be devastating as we face the prospect of a summer and potentially winter without festivals. In Edinburgh, there are particular concerns as vacancy data<sup>26</sup> shows the city amongst the hardest hit in the UK in the drop in vacancies alongside a reported £53m hole in the City Council budget.<sup>27</sup>

Almost unimaginable shifts have been made in the state's response to the sudden insecurity faced by millions, both in the level of financial support and the compassion with which it is administered. **If this is right for now, we believe it is right for the future.** Temporary improvements to some UK social security payments should be locked in now to prevent more people being pulled into poverty when their incomes drop.

**We must take bold action to ensure a decent income for all**, whether that is building on changes to Universal Credit and legacy benefits or more radical changes such as a Citizen's Basic Income (which we will be addressing further in our full report in the autumn). We now need to build a social security system, in Scotland and the UK, that provides us all with the support we need at different times of our lives – in and out of work, when we face high housing costs or the extra costs of disability and caring.

In rebuilding, **we must ensure we create a fairer economy** where people providing vital services are valued appropriately and enabled to live a life free of poverty. In our work to date we had already observed the damaging impact of an extreme gap in wealth and poverty in the city. As we address the economic shock, we are currently experiencing we must resist reverting to practices which allow this inequality to continue. That means not just state support for those on the lowest incomes but creating an economy where everyone shares more equitably in success. We clearly need bold action from UK and Scottish Governments to rebuild the economy, but we are also clear that some of the most successful institutions in the city must make more of a contribution to enabling all of our communities to thrive.

As we focus on rebuilding, we should further strengthen **the right support in the places we live and enable culture change to lead system change**. We should bring together what has been forged in emergency with the learning we already have from promising work focussing on integrating support, for example from the perspective of the physical assets in My Gracemount, shifting Health and Social Care to personalised asset-based approaches through 3 Conversations and Community Renewal's development of holistic community support in Bingham/Magdalene. We should aim for small teams, drawing staff from statutory, third and business sectors operating at a small local level using simple existing methods to connect, assess need and build on assets. Alongside **we must develop a phased approach to shift all funding, planning, delivery and measurement from organisational impact on specific outcomes to whole system impact to build the capability and wellbeing of people and communities**. We should build on shifts in how and where statutory services operate, do this at scale, have confidence to try new approaches, evaluate and alter plans to change direction if we need to.

More detail on these points and key actions to be taken in the city will be incorporated in our final report to be published in the autumn.



## Conclusion

We could not have imagined the way this Coronavirus outbreak would impact us. Watching and reading reports from other countries ahead of us in the spread of the virus gave us only scant insight into how it would actually feel. What is overwhelming is the shared emotional response, both to direct personal impacts and our empathy with others who have been affected in the most devastating ways. As we emerge from this crisis we must hold on to that emotional response and place it at the heart of our efforts to rebuild. In the last fifteen months we too often heard that people living in poverty felt much of the city does not belong to them, that citizens of Edinburgh in general are not aware of poverty, don't understand their circumstances and don't care. In the last month, we have seen a massive increase in understanding of shared hardship and poverty, often through first-hand experience, a deepening respect and gratitude to the largely low paid key workers enabling the city to operate and above all else solidarity with our fellow citizens.

We propose building a movement of people with experience of poverty and their allies, drawn from public and third sector services and business and also those citizens who have shown solidarity in such force in recent weeks. Our working title is **EndPovertyEdinburgh**. We should invest in it to develop our shared understanding of living in poverty, the solutions most likely to succeed and contributing to culture change. It should plug into decision making and hold the city to account, monitor progress, shine a light on how far we are making progress and celebrate the change we can make together.

With all its resources we are confident that Edinburgh is equal to the challenge of rebuilding. If nothing else the response of the city to this crisis so far has shown us that things we might have thought of as impossible can happen within days. To rebuild rather than just recover, to create a city free of poverty, where each and every person has the chance to thrive will take more change again. It will take an openness to involve everyone, bravery to let go of learned ways of working and embrace untested approaches, compassion to look after each other and a commitment to make a just transition to what comes next, all qualities which we have found more of in the last month than perhaps we might have expected. Let's hold on and build on what we have learned.

## Appendix: Members of Edinburgh Poverty Commission



**Dr Jim McCormick  
(Chair)**

Associate Director for  
Scotland at the Joseph  
Rowntree Foundation



**Cllr Cammy Day  
(Vice Chair)**

Depute Leader of the City of  
Edinburgh Council



**Mary Alexander**

Deputy Regional Secretary  
of Unite the Union



**Diana Noel-Paton**

Former Chief Executive of  
the Thistle Foundation and  
citizen of Edinburgh



**Zoe Ferguson**

Independent analyst and  
citizen of Edinburgh



**Craig Sanderson**

Former Chief Executive of  
Link Housing Association  
and citizen of Edinburgh



**Stephen Kelly**

Headteacher of Liberton  
High School in Edinburgh



**Betty Stevenson**

Convener of Edinburgh  
Tenants Federation and  
citizen of Edinburgh



**Chris Kilkenny**

Community campaigner and  
citizen of Edinburgh



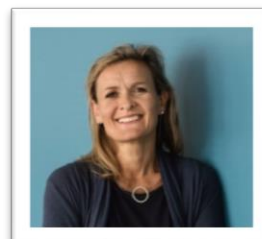
**Prof Carol Tannahill**

Chief Social Policy Adviser to  
Scottish Government and  
Director of the Glasgow  
Centre for Population Health



**Sandy MacDonald**

Head of Corporate  
Sustainability at Standard  
Life Aberdeen plc



**Celia Tennant**

Chief Executive of Inspiring  
Scotland

# Appendix: Timeline of Edinburgh Poverty Commission



## June 2018

Edinburgh Partnership and the City of Edinburgh Council, respectively approve the establishment of an independent Edinburgh Poverty Commission.

## October 2018

Dr Jim McCormick is appointed as the independent Chair with Cllr Cammy Day as Vice Chair.

## November 2018

The first full meeting of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission takes place.

### Phase 1: Pockets

Examining the pressures that keep incomes low and living costs high for people in Edinburgh

## February 2019

The first of three public calls for evidence. The second full meeting of the Commission on the theme of 'pockets' takes place.

### Phase 2: Prospects

Exploring what we can do to improve the wellbeing and life chances of people in poverty

## May 2019

The second of three public calls for evidence is launched and the first summary of emerging findings is published. The third full meeting of the Commission on the theme of 'prospects' takes place.

### Phase 3: Places

Defining steps the city can take to create well-designed, affordable, and sustainable places in Edinburgh

## September 2019

The last of three public calls for evidence is launched and the fourth full meeting of the Commission on the theme of 'places' takes place. A second summary of emerging findings and interim recommendations so far is published.

### Final Phase

## November 2019

Interim findings published.

## December 2019

The fifth full meeting of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission on the theme of 'designing the future' takes place.

## May 2020

Poverty and Coronavirus in Edinburgh interim report published.

## Autumn 2020

Final report to be published.

# Appendix: Sources of information and support

## Support for shielded people, and those in high risk groups

If you have received a letter from the Scottish Government about shielding, and need help with food or medicines, please contact the **City of Edinburgh Council** on **0131 200 2388** or by email [shielding@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:shielding@edinburgh.gov.uk)

For most of us, we're able to manage these difficult times ourselves with support from friends and family. However, if you are in a high-risk group ([www.bit.ly/2WFJfNN](http://www.bit.ly/2WFJfNN)) and do need additional help or support please call **0131 200 2306** or email [edinburghvulnerable@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:edinburghvulnerable@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Homelessness

To support the most vulnerable members of society during the coronavirus outbreak five Council Resilience Centres have been established and will be open only for people who require access to emergency assistance with **urgent homelessness, urgent cash payments, and harassment cases where imminent and real threat exists**.

Details of how to use these Centres are available on the Council website ([www.bit.ly/3ftK8lj](http://www.bit.ly/3ftK8lj))

Alternatively, phone the **Homelessness and Housing Support Team** 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Thursday and 8.30am to 3.40pm on Friday on **0131 529 7125**.

Out of hours service on **0131 200 2000**, or freephone number **0800 032 5968**.

## Crisis grants

If you are without money for essential items such as food and fuel you could apply for a Crisis Grant. To find out how you can apply please phone **0131 529 5299**, or visit the Council website ([www.bit.ly/2WJ4lv4](http://www.bit.ly/2WJ4lv4))

## Advice, welfare, and benefits

For advice on a range of issues including benefits, debt, managing money, and living costs, there are people available and ready to support you during this crisis. Some good examples include:

- **The Advice Shop** - **0131 200 2360** ([www.bit.ly/2WHavvo](http://www.bit.ly/2WHavvo))
- **Citizen Advice Scotland Edinburgh** - **0131 510 5510** ([www.bit.ly/2YOm0Uz](http://www.bit.ly/2YOm0Uz))
- **CHAI Edinburgh** – **0131 442 1009** ([www.bit.ly/2SJFcPG](http://www.bit.ly/2SJFcPG))
- **Granton Information Centre** - **0131 551 2459** or **0131 552 0458** ([www.bit.ly/35JkbtK](http://www.bit.ly/35JkbtK))

## Finding a new job

If you've lost your job or are worried that you might, there is help available for you. There are organisations across the city who offer support, advice, and guidance to help you apply for jobs and prepare for interviews.

Contact **Next Step Edinburgh** and they'll put you in touch with the right organisation - **0300 365 0025** ([www.bit.ly/3fxzrhy](http://www.bit.ly/3fxzrhy))



# Appendix: Notes, references and sources

Cover photo: *Coronavirus rainbow* by Phil McIver, licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0, [www.bit.ly/2YGdWW6](http://www.bit.ly/2YGdWW6)

<sup>1</sup> Key sources: Child Poverty – End Child Poverty Coalition, Juliet Stone and Donald Hirsch (2019), Local indicators of child poverty, [www.bit.ly/2LvFe9T](http://www.bit.ly/2LvFe9T); Life expectancy – ScotPHO profiles toolkit, [www.bit.ly/2SWL5c6](http://www.bit.ly/2SWL5c6); School attainment – Local Government Benchmarking Framework, 2019, [www.bit.ly/2WJGOKd](http://www.bit.ly/2WJGOKd)

<sup>2</sup> [www.bit.ly/2WK6iau](http://www.bit.ly/2WK6iau)

<sup>3</sup> [www.bit.ly/35MDan8](http://www.bit.ly/35MDan8)

<sup>4</sup> [www.bit.ly/2WMxVQ1](http://www.bit.ly/2WMxVQ1)

<sup>5</sup> [www.bit.ly/2LkDIqU](http://www.bit.ly/2LkDIqU)

<sup>6</sup> Brook, Paul et al (2019), *Framing Toolkit: Talking About Poverty*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation & Frameworks Institute, [www.bit.ly/3fFZWbP](http://www.bit.ly/3fFZWbP)

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (April 2020), *State of the Economy*, [www.bit.ly/3bkC82U](http://www.bit.ly/3bkC82U), and City of Edinburgh Council estimates for Edinburgh

<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics (May 2020), *Business Impact of COVID-19 Survey (BICS)*, [www.bit.ly/3fDbhIL](http://www.bit.ly/3fDbhIL)

<sup>9</sup> Source: City of Edinburgh Council

<sup>10</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (May 2020), *Universal Credit declarations (claims) and advances: management information*, [www.bit.ly/3coSYyX](http://www.bit.ly/3coSYyX)

<sup>11</sup> Standard Life Foundation (April 2020), *April Financial Impact Tracker*, [www.bit.ly/2YRTtO3](http://www.bit.ly/2YRTtO3)

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Resolution Foundation (April 2020), *Risky Business: Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers*, [www.bit.ly/2LjFJDD](http://www.bit.ly/2LjFJDD)

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Georgina Bowyer and Morag Henderson (2020), *Race Inequality in the Workforce*, A Carnegie UK Trust, UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies and Operation Black Vote report, [www.bit.ly/35NonZc](http://www.bit.ly/35NonZc)

<sup>21</sup> The King's Fund (April 2020), *Ethnic minority deaths and Covid-19: what are we to do?*, [www.bit.ly/3bnBbH9](http://www.bit.ly/3bnBbH9)

<sup>22</sup> Office for National Statistics (April 2020), *Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 17 April 2020*, [www.bit.ly/2WpgICZ](http://www.bit.ly/2WpgICZ)

<sup>23</sup> [www.bit.ly/2Liz2Sf](http://www.bit.ly/2Liz2Sf)

<sup>24</sup> Source: City of Edinburgh Council

<sup>25</sup> Source: City of Edinburgh Council

<sup>26</sup> [www.bit.ly/2zr4POf](http://www.bit.ly/2zr4POf)

<sup>27</sup> [www.bit.ly/3blPJHb](http://www.bit.ly/3blPJHb)



Edinburgh  
Poverty  
Commission

## Contact us



**Edinburgh Poverty Commission**

c/o Policy & Insight | The City of Edinburgh Council | Business Centre 2.1 |  
4 East Market Street | Edinburgh | EH8 8BG



**strategyandinsight@edinburgh.gov.uk**



**[www.edinburghpovertycommission.org.uk](http://www.edinburghpovertycommission.org.uk)**



**@EndPovertyEdin**