

Another Edinburgh is Possible Our City

Edinburgh residents' experience of
council services



Published March 12th, 2021 by *Another Edinburgh is Possible*
Another Edinburgh is Possible is an independent alliance of communities and trade unionists, working to defend and extend public services in the city.

Foreword

I am delighted to have been asked to write the foreword to this excellent report reflecting the views of Edinburgh residents on council services both current and future.

The report highlights significant public concerns over the state of local services and the focus and priorities of the City of Edinburgh Council which are ‘out of kilter’ with residents’ views. The findings show residents have some sympathy with the council over the financial restrictions imposed by the Scottish and UK Governments and praises council workers who strive to do their best against the odds. It also makes some notable points and recommendations over how and what local services should be delivered.

We believe this report should be a ‘wake up’ call to Edinburgh’s politicians and service delivery leaders committed to tackling poverty and inequality and delivering a decent public service to all in the community. The strategic recommendations over Housing, Transport, Tourism and the In-Housing of Edinburgh’s Public Services are sensible ones that cannot be ignored in any serious attempt to end poverty in this wealthy city. Alongside the recommendations of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission to promote “A Just Capital” and End Poverty in Edinburgh by 2030, we lay down a serious challenge to the Council to listen to its residents and communities and respond by using the budget process to reverse the decline in services; build more social housing and tackle the increasing inequality and poverty made worse by the pandemic. More secure and better paid jobs are key, particularly in the utilisation of public funds through commissioning and procuring services which too often do not reflect the ‘Fair Work’ principles

Another Edinburgh is Possible is an amalgamation of various community activist groups across Edinburgh who have come together to express their concerns and campaign for better local services. They are committed to shifting the paradigm of community activism and local democracy and this report is a promising start. The collective has commissioned, designed and delivered a credible research project which provides a valuable insight for local decision makers. Edinburgh’s political leaders must pay heed to this report, those who produced it and, importantly, the voices of residents contained within it.

Mary Alexander

Depute Regional Secretary for Scotland, Unite the Union.

Edinburgh Poverty Commission member

Fair Work Convention member



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Summary of the report’s key findings

1. Edinburgh residents think services are deteriorating.

Only four per cent of respondents to our survey think that council services are better than three years ago. Fifty five percent think they are worse.

2. There are high levels of dissatisfaction with many council services.

Of all the services provided by the council, public toilets attracted the most adverse comments. Housing, homelessness services, social work, social care, community centres and community education are also considered to be poor. Many respondents backed up their ratings with detailed open comments. Roads and pavements are considered to be poorly maintained and dangerous to users.

3. The problem is city wide

An analysis of survey responses, at a postcode level, shows that dissatisfaction with services and worsening services are a problem for the entire city.

4. Some services received high levels of satisfaction.

Museums and galleries, transport and parks rated highly although parks could be cleaner.

5. The council has a serious problem with communication.

Many people report that they have poor experience when trying to contact the council. A lack of response and failure to deliver on commitments made are frequently cited by respondents.

6. Bins and litter provoked a large number of angry written responses

Thirty six percent rank refuse services as good, twenty six percent poor. Yet at the same time large numbers provide eloquent and angry testimony to failures in the service. There is a perception that different areas of the city are not served equally.

7. Respondents dissent from the council's policy priorities

Spaces for people attracts a lot of negative comments. On the other hand, cycling is a priority for many. Written comments express the view that the council's priorities are tourism, business and the city centre with Edinburgh residents and the periphery of the city coming a poor second.

8. A new approach to tourism

When thinking about the future a frequent response is that a more considerate form of tourism that works with residents (as opposed to for itself) is needed

9. Edinburgh residents think that local services should be publicly provided and democratically controlled.

Seventy four percent of respondents to our survey agree with this, seven percent disagree.

10. Edinburgh residents believe that public transport should be integrated, publicly owned and free.

Fifty seven percent of respondents to our survey agreed with this, fifteen percent disagree.

Introduction

Since 2012/13, Edinburgh City Council budget cuts have amounted to £320 million. Year on year of so-called 'savings' have resulted in a hollowing out of jobs and services to Edinburgh residents.

This is in the context of local government receiving a declining share of Scottish Government spending.

The local government revenue settlement as a proportion of the Scottish Government revenue budget decreased by 1.7 percentage points between 2013-14 and 2018-19.

(Local government finance facts and figures – Scottish Parliament website)

Over the last 12 months, Covid-19 has been devastating communities across Scotland. It has also shone a light on the destruction to public services brought about by a decade of austerity.

Many people agree that things cannot simply go back to the way they were before. However, *Another Edinburgh is Possible* believes that if we don't fight for them to be better, it is more than possible they will be worse. We are concerned that the UK and Scottish

governments will attempt to use Covid-19 as a pretext for cutting back local government budgets yet further. Edinburgh Council has already identified over £80m of savings and funding in 2020/21 but has to find at least £5.1m more because of the extra costs and lower income resulting from the pandemic. Over the next three years, the Council has already identified £40m of 'savings' but needs to find at least a further £47.5m.

Another Edinburgh is Possible not only believes this is unnecessary; it is unsustainable. Year after year of cuts have pushed services to the edge and the people of Edinburgh are paying the price. We also believe more cuts will further weaken local democracy and accelerate the centralisation of power over local issues in the Westminster and Holyrood parliaments.

We believe that the citizens of Edinburgh deserve far better than this. It is in this light that *Another Edinburgh is Possible* decided to carry out a survey amongst Edinburgh residents and service users to ask them directly about their experiences of current council service provision and the services they would like to see in the future.

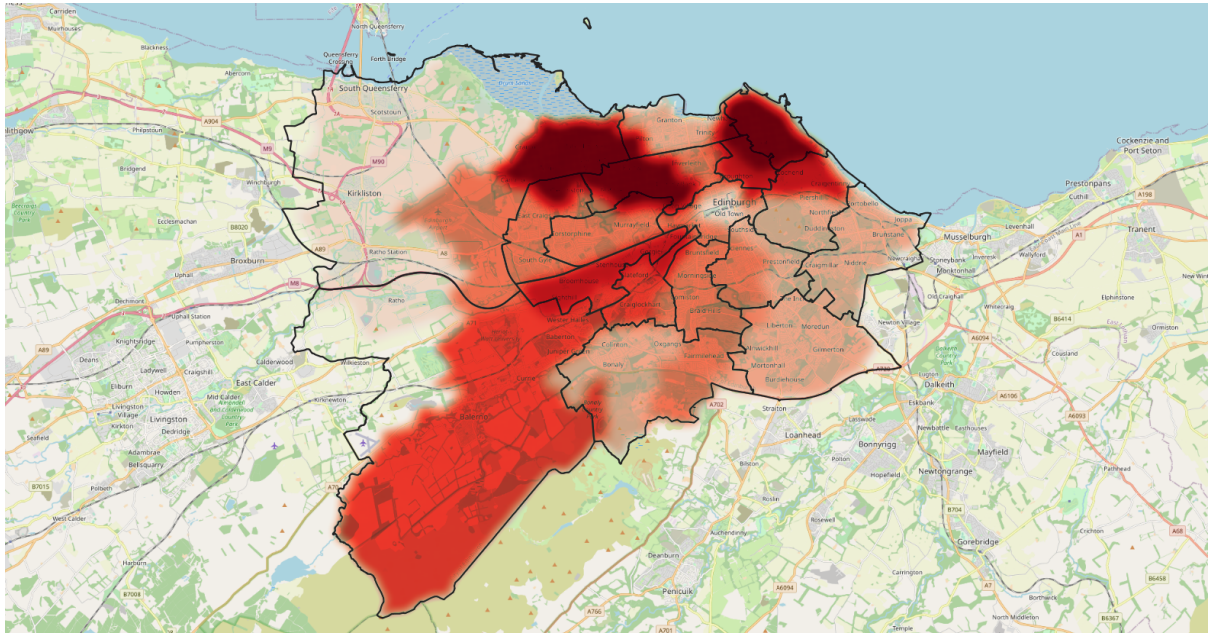
This report provides an analysis of the 509 responses that were received between 7th December and 21st February 2021 when the survey closed. It concludes by making recommendations for the Council.

It's worth noting that during December our survey ran in parallel with the Council's budget consultation. Only 3 in 10 of those who responded to our survey said that they were aware of the Council's consultation.

[Note: how we analysed the data from the survey is explained in an Appendix at the end of the report.]

For more information: email us at edinburghjustrecovery@gmail.com, visit the Another Edinburgh is Possible website at www.anotheredinburghispossible.org

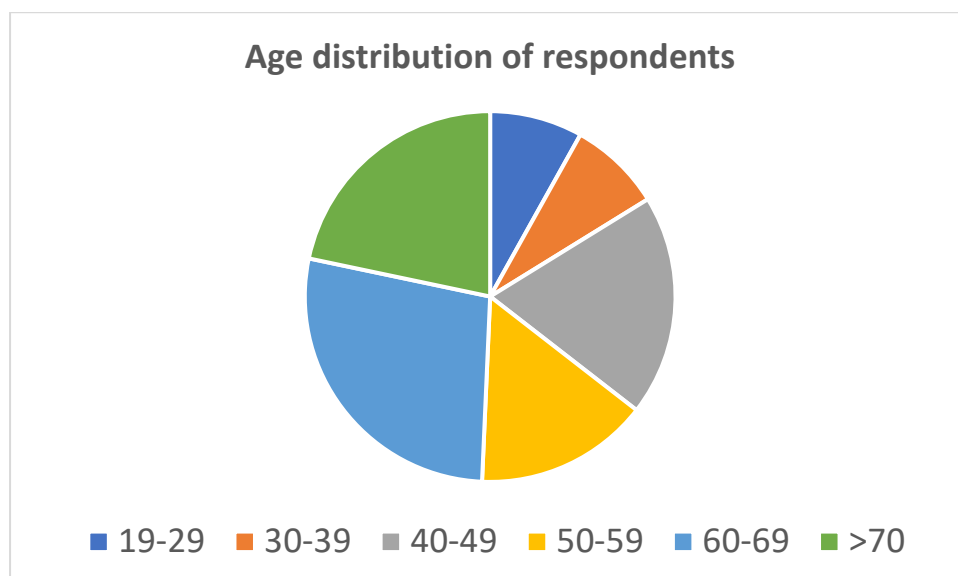
About the respondents



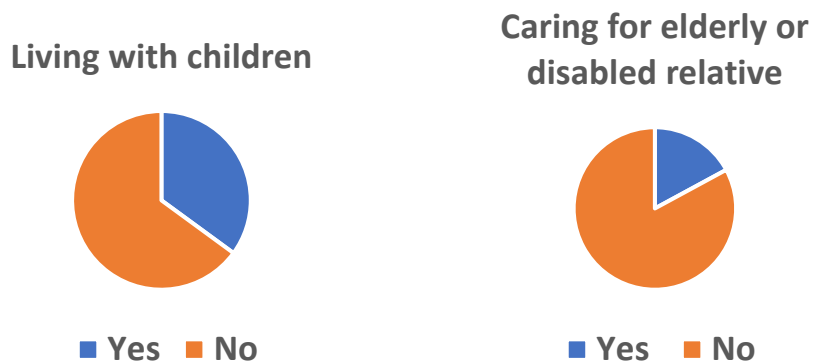
The heat map shows how survey responses were distributed across the city – darker shades represent higher numbers of responses.

By the time the survey closed on 21st February 2021 we had received 509 valid responses. There is a good spread across all Edinburgh postcode areas. While the data didn't allow us to map responses against the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), the six most common postcodes, EH6, EH4, EH11, EH7, EH14 and EH12, providing more than half the responses, represent a significant proportion of the most deprived SIMD data zones in Edinburgh.

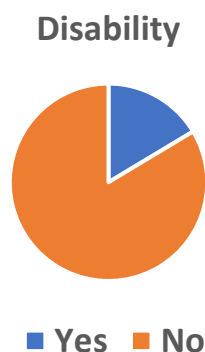
The average age of respondents is approximately 51. Given that there were no responses from under nineteens this is fairly representative of the city's overall demographics.



Edinburgh residents from a BAME background are underrepresented, although we made proactive efforts to reach these communities. 47.8% of respondents identified as female, 46.5% as male, 2.2% as non-binary and 1.9% preferred not to answer. Just over 35% of the respondents are living in a household that included children and 17% are caring for an elderly or disabled relative.



16% identify as having a disability.



What respondents had to say

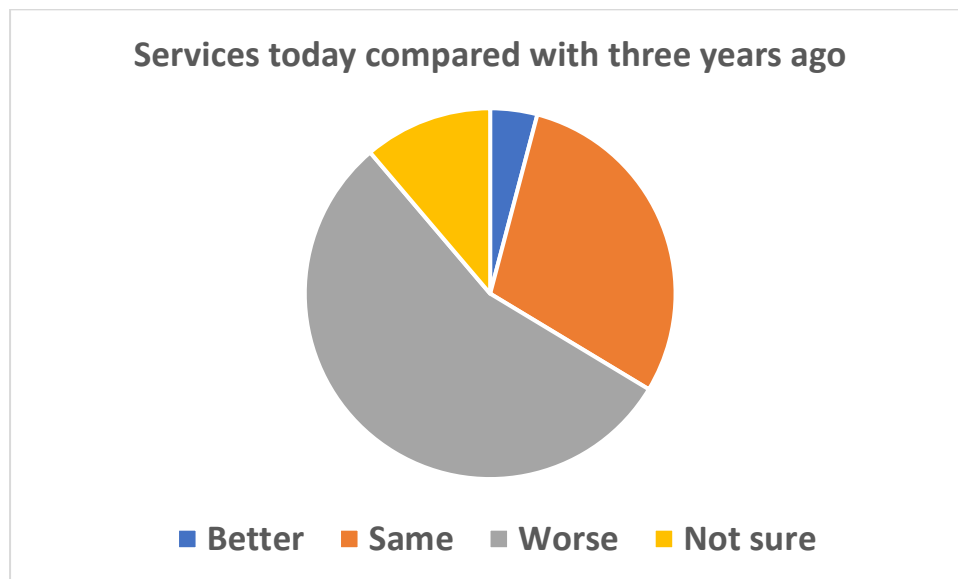
In this section quantitative data from the tick box questions is combined with analysis of the written open responses that were received. More than half of all those who responded to the survey took the time to provide additional written responses. This qualitative data amounted to more than 12,000 words. Together the quantitative and qualitative data provides a rich source of experience, heartfelt feelings and experience.

Overall, there is a consensus that the quality of services has declined. We asked respondents to compare their current experience with the situation three years ago. Only 4.1% feel things are better while 55.1% say that they are worse. One response states:

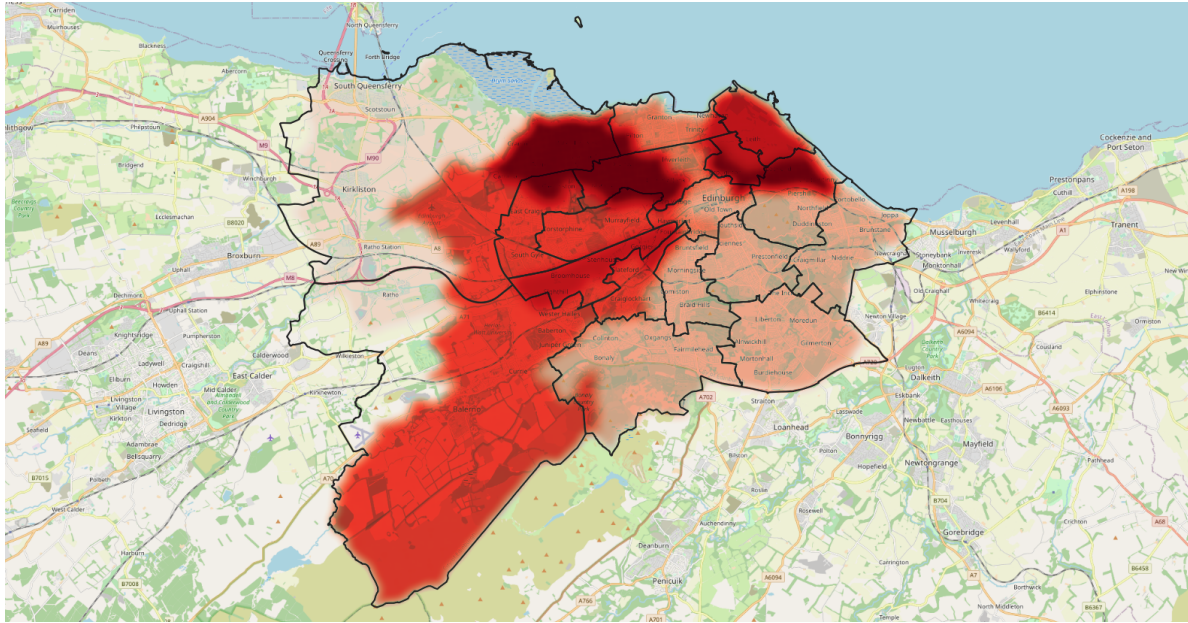
The council's 'transformation' agenda has seen a race to the bottom - NO council service has improved and most have got worse.

Another, a council employee, notes that cuts are severely impacting on the ability to meet climate emergency targets:

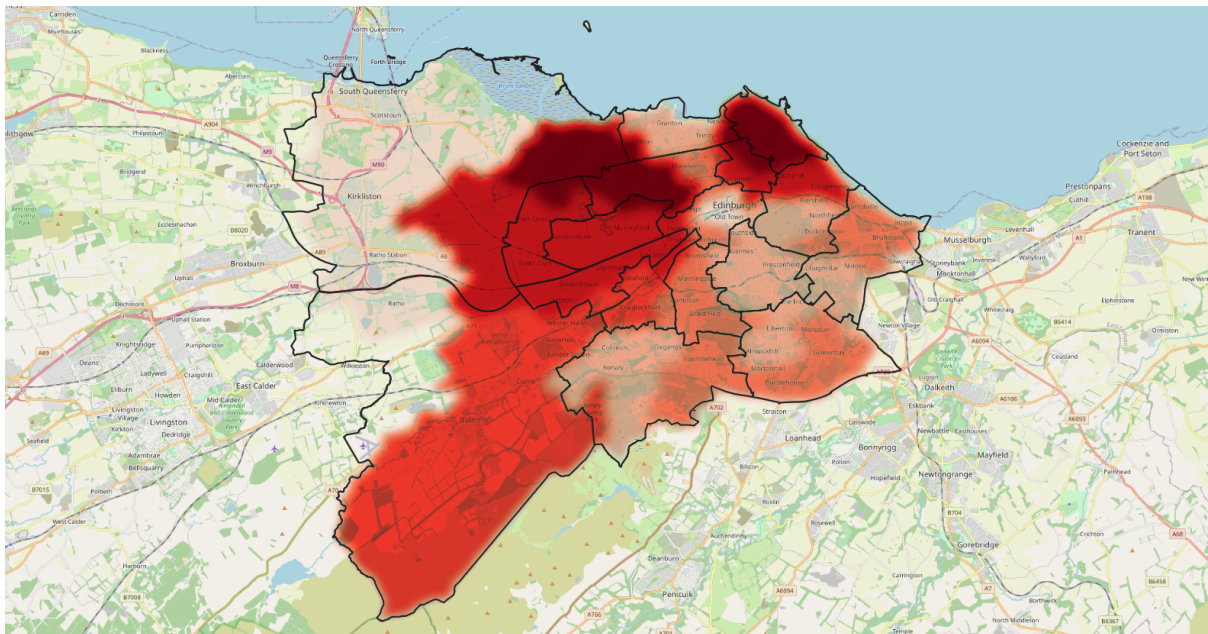
In specialist services like promotion of sustainability there has been a wholesale loss of staff capacity - and only temporary staff providing any capacity on e.g. The CEC response to the Climate Emergency declared on 7 Feb 2019 which should really be transforming the way the authority prioritises activities.



The written comments provide eloquent back up to this dissatisfaction, together with some praise, sympathy and understanding. Particularly noteworthy is the praise, sympathy and understanding for employees and the funding dilemma, indicating that many people, whilst critical of the Council, appreciate what it does with the little it has, and may wish for more funding. Careful analysis of the distribution of responses showed that dissatisfaction with services and perception of worsening services is widespread and not limited to particular parts of the city. Similarly, the perception of whether services are good or fair, mirrors the distribution of respondents across the city rather than being confined to particular areas.



Heat map of distribution of responses stating that council services are poor



Heat map of response stating that council services have worsened over the last 3 years

and doubt the purpose of the council. Not everyone has, can afford, nor use a computer. Telephone is surely still a viable means to communicate with a public office, I like to be able to talk to a person to sort problems out.

Access to services or to contact council is all online - this takes away the option of an older relative making an enquiry themselves- they still pay council tax but feel marginalised.

Roads

The next largest number of negative comments refer to the state of the city's roads.

Most services I'm happy with but road services are in an awful state. The 'rolling repair' schedule currently reported as being in operation is well short of requirements with some of the worst road conditions I've seen in the capital for many years.

The road I stay has large pot holes that have got worse over the last year and the drains in the street are blocked and is causing flooding when it rains, I have sent several emails to the council departments but to no avail.

The view that standards of maintenance and repair are unacceptably low also includes the condition of pavements and street cleansing.

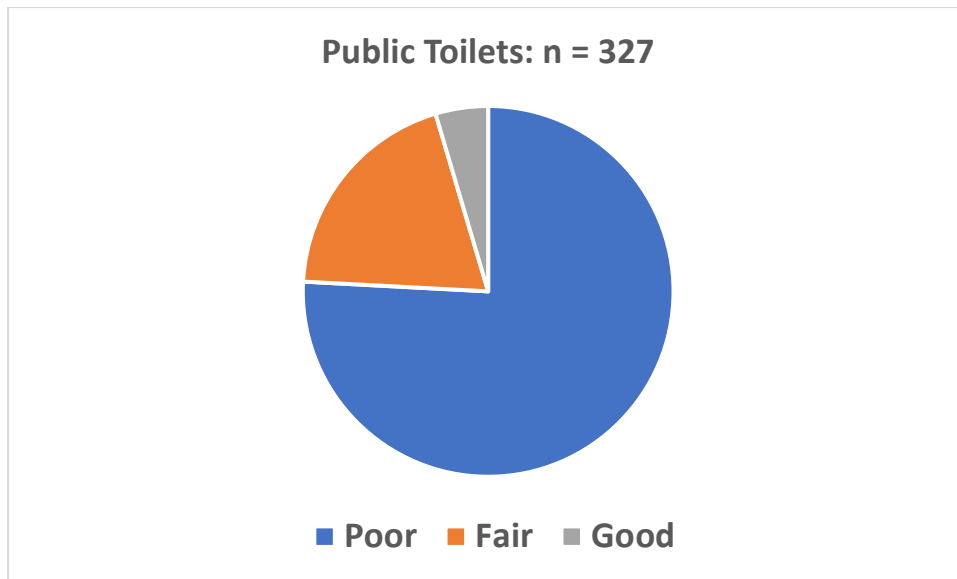
A number of people were angry about the 'Spaces for People' policy. Some feel it is badly implemented and makes things more difficult or dangerous for pedestrians; on the other hand, there are also positive comments about improved recognition of the needs of cyclists.

Public Toilets

In the survey respondents were given a list (not exhaustive) of council services and asked to rate those that they used as either Poor, Fair or Good. The service which receives the worst rating was the provision of public toilets. More than sixty percent responded to this question.

Public toilet facilities are farcical either to the point of not existing due to being closed, are not numerous enough across the city or are in terrible condition and state of maintenance and cleaning. Unacceptable.

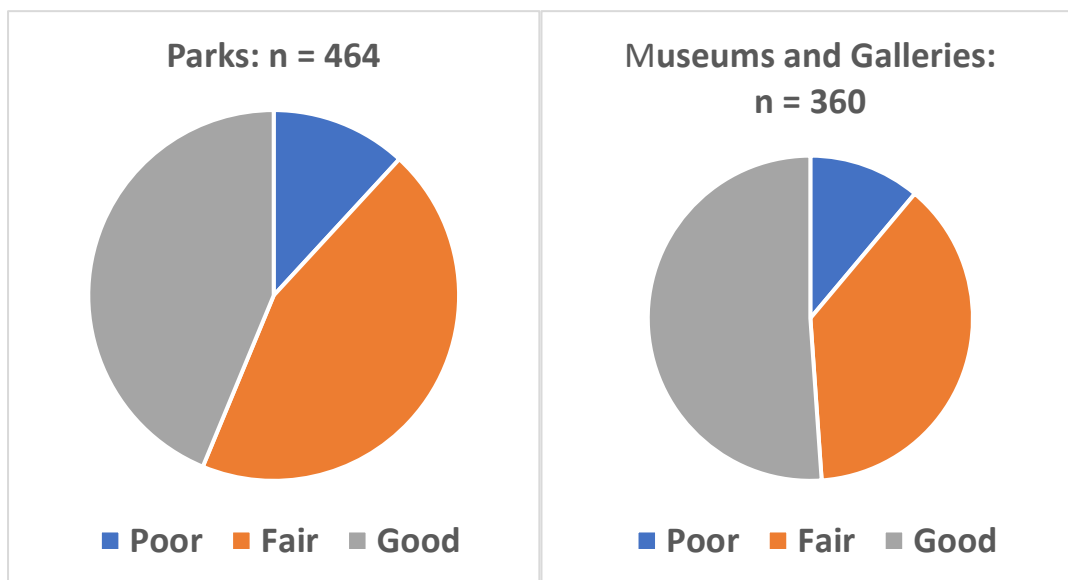
The negative view of provision indicated by the data is underlined by the open comments. There are eighteen negative and no positive statements.



Taken overall the comments suggest that the state of public toilets was a concern before the pandemic, and now, when opportunities to be outdoors are limited, the lack of these facilities is a real problem, particularly for families with young children and for older people.

Parks, Museums and Galleries

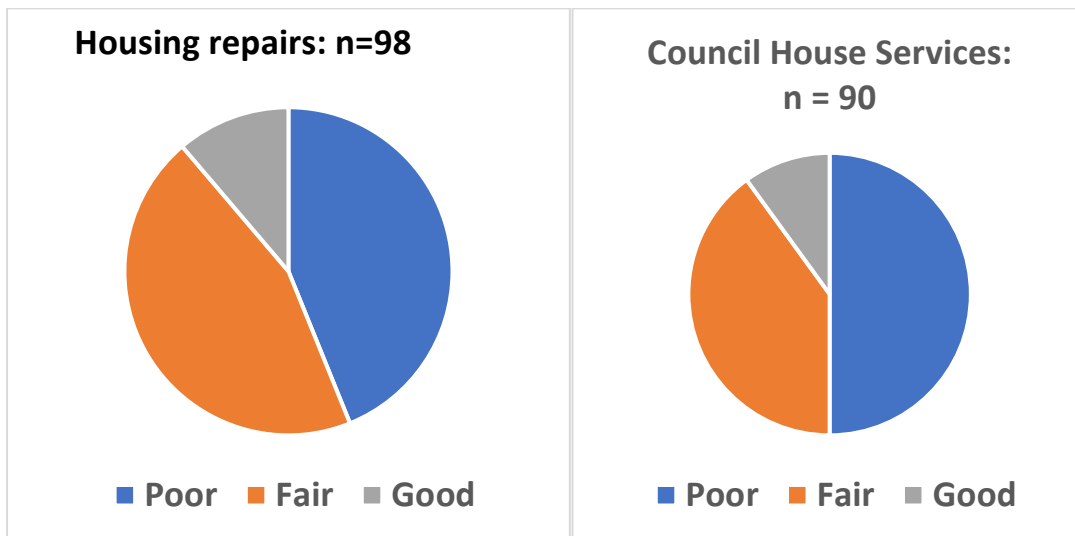
In contrast to the overwhelmingly negative response to the provision of public toilets, these amenities are rated good or fair by a very high proportion of those responding.



It seems likely that these ratings reflect the importance of parks, museums and galleries when other forms of leisure activity are restricted.

Housing

Less than twenty percent of those surveyed are in receipt of housing services but responses show a significant level of dissatisfaction.



Lifts in block kaput for months on end.

Stair cleaning was not done from march to August [by] Contractor ISS and did not get a refund.

One response states simply 'more support for the homeless'; levels of satisfaction with homelessness services are similar to those for housing. Views on housing and homelessness reflect wide concern and mesh with concerns about Air BnB and tourism.

I've been trying to access housing for nearly 3 years...unsuccessfully.



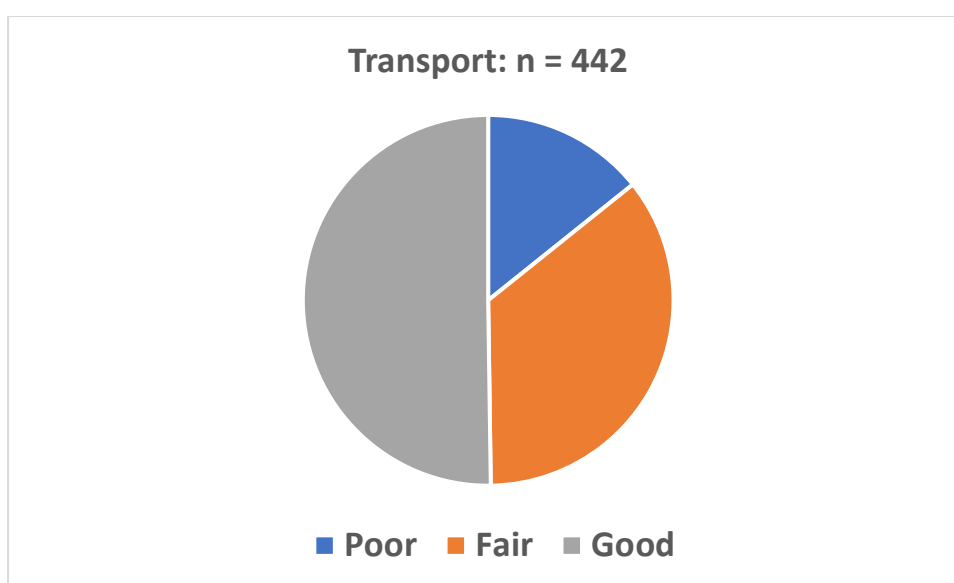
Transport

There are a small number of comments that the money for the trams was misspent. Overall levels of satisfaction with transport in the city is high. Nevertheless, comments are nuanced, for example:

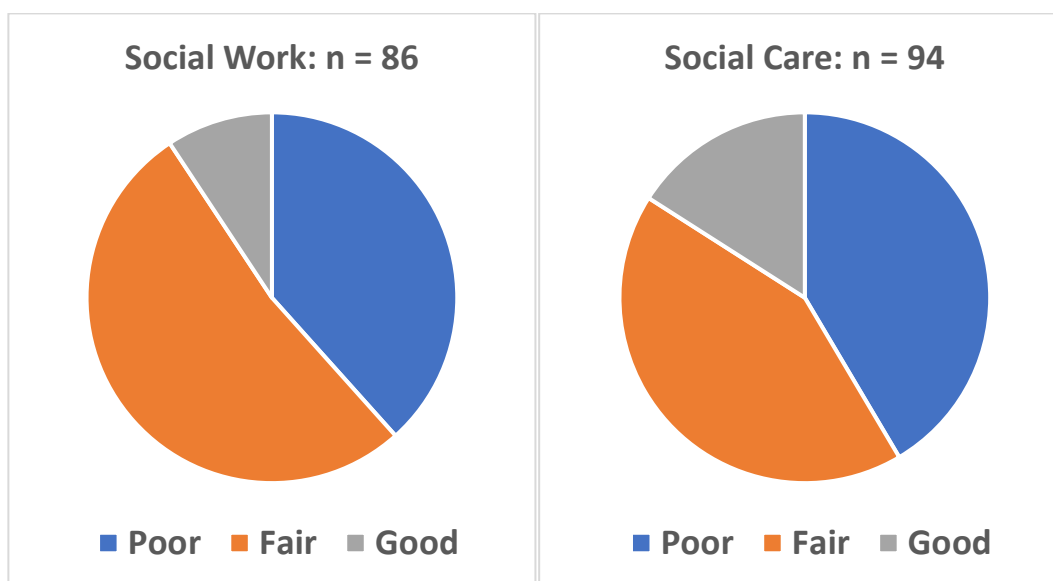
Buses not always good out with busy services and expensive.

Buses are too busy at peak times and there are some routes that aren't covered.

Travelling around Edinburgh is more difficult. The poor condition of the roads, the tram work disruptions, the corralling of cars into single lanes causing congestion and pollution.



Social Work and Social Care



Although these areas don't attract the worst ratings, the proportions of replies that rate these services poor must be a cause for concern.

The wait for care packages is awful and only provides the bare minimum. Relatives are spending far too much time in hospital waiting, often to the detriment of their health and well-being.

My mum needs more care and there are not enough Carer's to give her this. She lies in bed all day often waiting for emergency care team to get her up as she doesn't have 2 Carer's assigned to her.

The most vulnerable in our city have been hardest hit by changes in the benefits system, by austerity and the pandemic. One story submitted in the open comments highlights this:

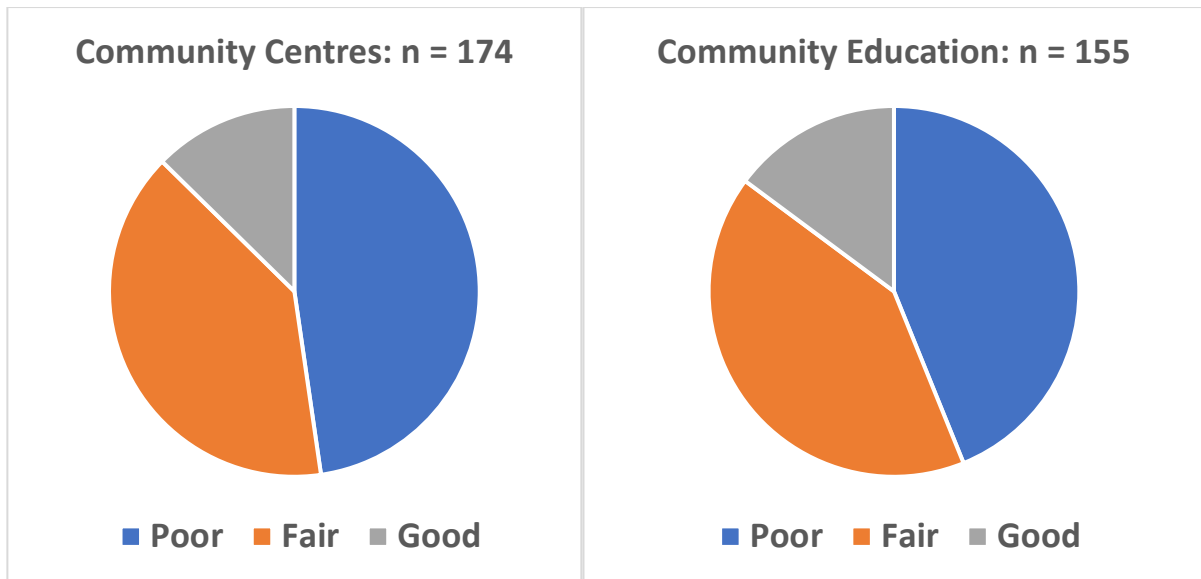
My partner was cripplingly ill for over a year: I received no support. I needed someone to come in and give me a break from the caring work. I had to work (from home - almost impossible), do our shopping, do all cooking and housework, do everything for him e.g. lifting a cup for him so he could have a drink, do his medical care, and try to comfort him at the same time as everything else as he was in so much agony and distress. It was a terrible time for both of us and it would have made a huge difference to know we had support, or someone to call and speak to, anything at all. I would have loved a break and I know he felt bad about needing me to do so much.

Community Centres and Community Education

Community Centre provision is rated as poor by thirty nine percent of respondents.

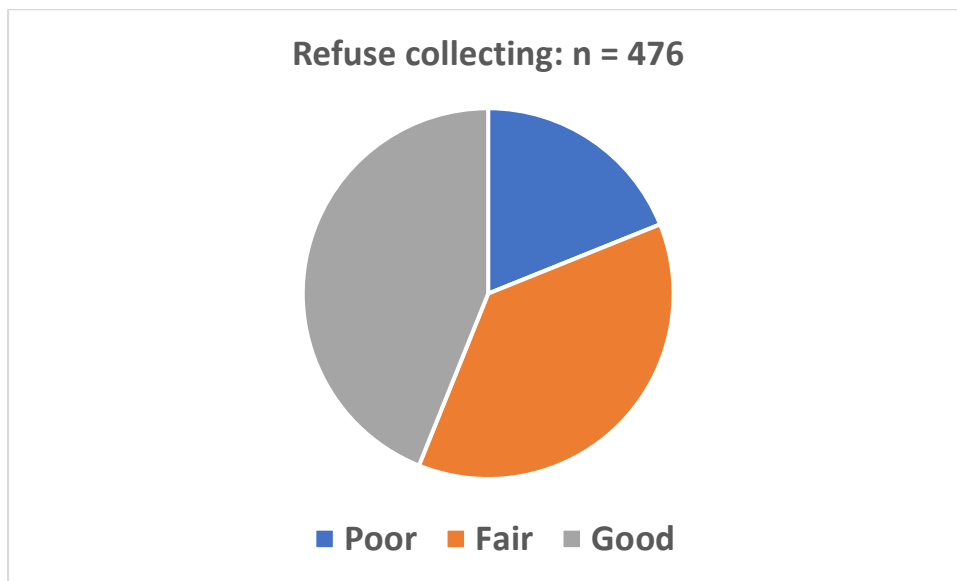
Our local community centre, Pentland is hardly open, it's a wasted building with minimal services for the community (pre-Covid).

Levels of satisfaction with the Community Education Service are similar.



Bins and refuse

Opinions here are divided. Waste, refuse and recycling attract around twenty percent of the positive comments recorded in the open response part of the survey.



Yet at the same time multiple statements vent anger and distress at failures of the service.

Bins have been overflowing in the last 6 months.

Bins always full. Being used for tipping by a variety of people not just residents.

Rubbish is not collected often enough, this includes recycling. This is an ongoing problem. On the top of it, the rubbish pick up is very frequently missed - the people on the phone never know why and nobody ever calls back to clarify. It just happens and they expect us to accept it.

Bins frequently full to overflowing. Parks filled with litter.

My stair cleaning is worse the bins are like a fly tipper spot.

Some responses make it clear that while refuse collection, recycling and litter are linked the experience of these services is mixed.

I want to separate refuse collection from recycling collection. I rarely find a problem with overflowing bins but often can't fit my recycling into local bins.

Waste recycling centre (Sighthill), excellent, especially since Covid started.

Rubbish is not collected often enough, this includes recycling. This is an ongoing problem. On the top of it, the rubbish pick up is very frequently missed - the people on the phone never know why and nobody ever calls back to clarify. It just happens and they expect us to accept it. The other issue, not completely unrelated is the amount of rubbish and mess on the streets, especially more dense residential parts with flats. There doesn't seem to be anyone ever sweeping the streets, even though they are public streets and not private.

Schools and Nurseries

These are valued services, and the tick box responses reflects this. However, a number of comments reflect real concerns.

Support in schools not meeting needs

Lack of funding in schools means increasing class sizes, poorer facilities (or building new schools that are too small within 5 years of being built) and lack of resources.

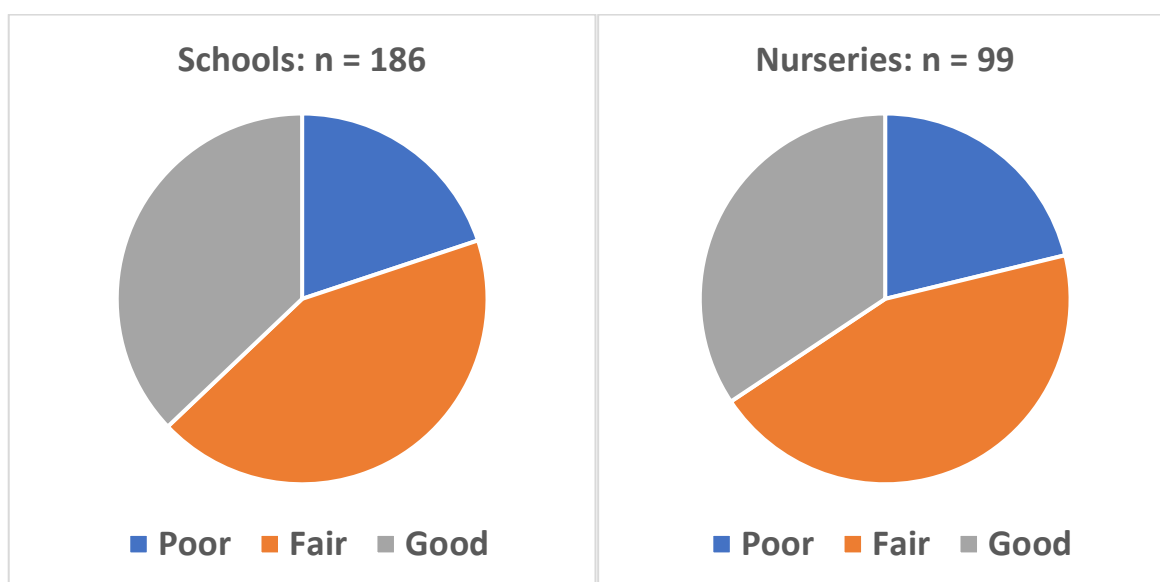
I am sure the squeeze felt in schools is soaked up by additional hard work by and financial contributions from, teachers.

Support for schools and nurseries seems to have declined which affects myself and family members doing their jobs in a negative way

I am a teacher and only have an iPad to do my work on. This is quite a few years old. I have been promised from my Headteacher that new iPads are going to be available

soon for staff- not yet. As staff we would prefer laptops - the functionality of iPads is limited. But the Council continue down the iPad route regardless.

Primary education needs to be funded properly. There are less teaching assistants in schools now than there was 10 years ago. This means that children who need extra support do not get it. Likewise, schools have next to no resources. Schools are constantly fund raising to raise money to buy basic resources like toys. It's embarrassing that a first world country like Scotland can't provide basic learning resources for our children.

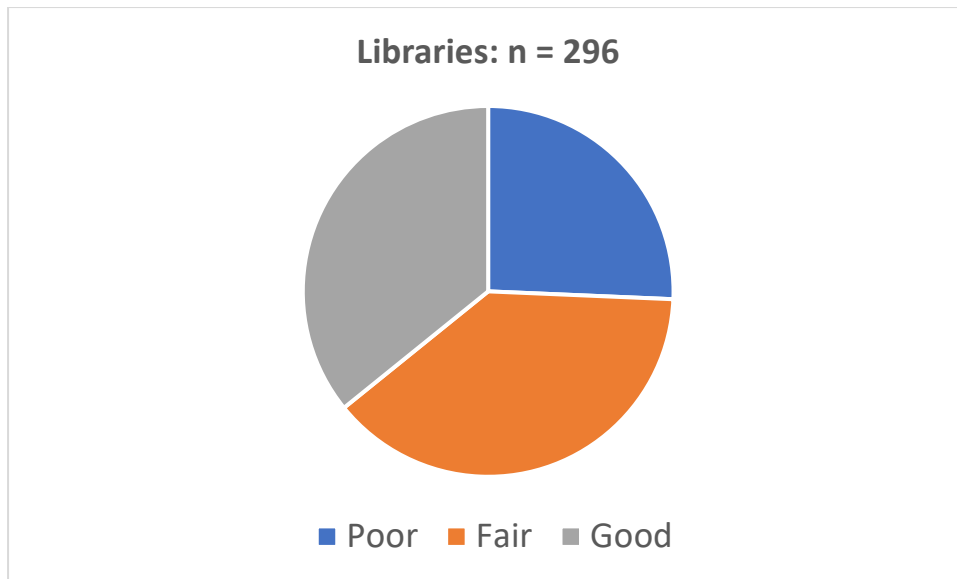


Libraries

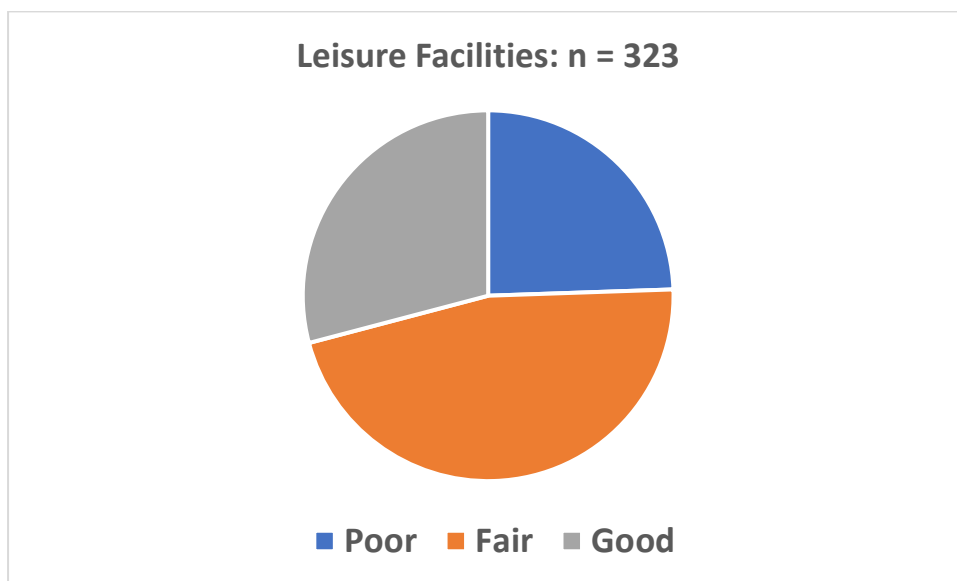
In commenting on library services many people distinguish between pre-Covid and Covid.

I feel the squeeze in our libraries and feel it would be harmful to see their hours cut further.

I make use of libraries and public toilets more than other services offered so can only comment on them. Both reasonable (for someone living near central Edinburgh) until hit by COVID (except too many public toilets sold off). Both essential services that should be maintained after COVID. No need for overcrowding in libraries but in the summer opened well after non-essential shops.



Leisure Facilities



Interestingly, comments about leisure come up exclusively in response to the final question in the survey which asked about the future (see also the next section).

I would like to see more leisure activities supported by council with lower cost. More support for the arts.

Mental healthcare readily available, facilities for youngsters, investment in outside activities for people of all ages.

A massive drive to enrich the lives of all the inhabitants of the city, by investing heavily in education, in free interactive public arts, and mental and spiritual well-being.

Looking to the future

The final question in the survey asked for ideas about any services not currently provided by the council. What council services would you like to see in the future? This attracted more than 25% of all the written comments. A number of strong themes emerged. Some reinforce points that had already been made but others looked ahead to significant change.

The perception that Edinburgh is for tourists, not those who live and work within its boundaries, is strong and there is a desire for a different form of tourism that works with residents.

People want services delivered inhouse and not outsourced. They want council services, in for example, care, digital, litter collection, road repairs and support for residents to be expanded. This could/should create jobs.

Public conveniences need to be improved in terms of quantity and quality of provision. However, respondents are also concerned about equality and diversity to ensure that the provision accommodates all (particularly disability and gender concerns).

Housing is a concern and better housing for people is needed. The systems around housing and housing allocation need to be improved. These points are highlighted both by concerns around tourism/Air BnB and student housing increasing, but also in reference to difficulties and problems people have highlighted in the system for social housing allocation

Parks and greenspaces are generally good but need to be cleaner.

More recycling, cleaner streets and better refuse collection is required.

In thinking about the future people want the council to be more responsive to the needs of citizens/residents. There is a strong sense that the council is failing in its two-way communications with its service users.

Overall, most people want to see more council services and improvements to existing ones.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are taken directly from the qualitative feedback received from respondents or are inferences reasonably drawn from comments which point towards clear expectations as to the future of Edinburgh's public services.

1. **The in-housing of Edinburgh's public services:** our survey confirmed a widespread frustration at a perceived lack of accountability from service-providers. One conclusion

is that services be delivered in-house. That would immediately clarify lines of responsibility, providing greater transparency to residents regarding who is accountable for quality of delivery. As things stand, a mosaic of providers means service users are often unsure of who to contact should they have questions or queries regarding any one service. Councilors would also be in a stronger position to make a case for additional funding if they are directly responsible for services that they are democratically accountable for. The incentive to improve would be re-directed towards elected politicians as opposed to distant corporations with little connection to the city or its people.

2. **Improved council communications with Edinburgh residents:** Residents expect direct and unmediated contact with council officials. Internet access should not be a prerequisite for residents looking to speak to those responsible for delivering key amenities. Dedicated phone-lines employing trained advisors familiar with Edinburgh services would make a significant contribution to council/resident relationships. Mobile advice centres, council officer as well as Councilors' surgeries and improved public access to Council Chambers might also build confidence in a council which to many feels remote and unaccountable.
3. **A re-ordering of council priorities:** the commodification of public space is not referred to specifically in our report. However, this is an issue many residents have repeatedly raised over the years, and it is reasonable to infer that many of the frustrations expressed by respondents imply an expectation that a city as beautiful as Edinburgh should be accessible to all, and not only tourists and the culture industries which too often price people out of their own streets. For instance, cultural facilities which are accessible –galleries, museums and parks –score highly in satisfaction ratings. In contrast, 36% of respondents are unhappy with the quality of their community centres, and only 20% are content with housing, a perennial and growing concern amplified by Air BnB and student accommodation which reflect Edinburgh's globally recognized social capital. Consequently, a delegating downwards of cultural centres and activity and the resourcing of local creative initiatives could contribute to a year-long re-imagining of how art and culture can take root outside of the City centre.
4. **Edinburgh transport should be integrated, publicly owned and resourced:** Comments on transport were limited, perhaps reflecting a general contentment with the quality of service provided by Lothian buses. However even here, the survey recorded complaints regarding how busy buses can become, their cost and the quality of Edinburgh's roads. An integrated transport service could knit together the varied concerns that an otherwise popular service still attracts. A joined-up, publicly owned matrix of services would be better equipped to incorporate a sustainable network in one of the busiest cities in Europe, particularly during the Festival.

APPENDIX – how we collected and analysed the survey data

The survey was designed by a working group made up of members of *Another Edinburgh is Possible* and included individuals with previous experience of survey design and data analysis. The survey went online on 7th December 2020. The data that forms the basis of this report derives from all the valid responses up to 21st February 2021. This time frame allowed us to overlap with Edinburgh City Council's own online survey. When the survey closed 509 people with an Edinburgh postcode had replied.

The survey conducted both quantitative and qualitative primary research amongst Edinburgh residents (status derived from postcode data). The survey included a variety of question styles, including multiple choice, rating scale as well as more open questions where participants should provide more information to expand upon any of the questions within the survey.

We used a simple google form to construct a survey which could be made available via the *Another Edinburgh is Possible* website, email, and social media. Participants were self-selecting.

We chose an electronic survey for ease of distribution, although we had originally planned to use both electronic and paper formats. However, further Covid-19 restrictions made it impossible to distribute hard copies, hence all results are from the electronic version only.

We used a variety of channels to disseminate the survey. The survey link was distributed via a paid for Facebook advertisement aimed at anyone living in Edinburgh. The campaign promoted the survey on Facebook, Twitter and its website. We asked people on the *Another Edinburgh is Possible* mailing list, and the organisations that they are active in, to share with friends, family and workmates and to ask them in turn to share. All the Edinburgh Community Councils with a functioning email address were contacted and asked to distribute via their networks. There was positive feedback from a small number of the Community Councils. We know that the link was emailed to Unite members, advertised by Edinburgh TUC and by the Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh and publicized by at least one local Church community.

Results for quantitative data are descriptive and are measured through pie charts and graphs. Thematic analysis was used systematically to interpret patterns and meanings in the qualitative data.

Acknowledgement

Another Edinburgh is Possible is grateful for the support that it has received from Unite the Union, Unison – City of Edinburgh Council and Edinburgh Trades Union Council

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e: edinburghjustrecovery@gmail.com

w: www.anotheredinburghispossible.org

t: @AnotherEdinburg