



2025 update

Actions to End Poverty in Edinburgh

October 2025



Contents

Summary and key messages	3
Foreword – Five years on.....	7
Our purpose and principles	9
What we have learned	12
Our 2025 calls to action.....	27
A big thank you	42
Meet the Commissioners.....	43
Summary of our 2025 calls to action.....	44

Summary and key messages

The Edinburgh Poverty Commission was formed in 2018 to provide an independent assessment of the causes of and solutions to poverty in Scotland's capital city. In 2020 we published our A Just Capital report, which set out calls to action needed to end poverty in Edinburgh by 2030.

In those calls to action, we said that by 2030 Edinburgh should aim to be a city in which:

- **No one has to go without the basic essentials they need to eat, keep clean and stay warm and dry**
- **Fewer than one in ten children and fewer than one in ten adults are living in relative poverty at any given time**
- **No-one lives in persistent poverty, and**
- **No one feels stigmatised, abandoned, or treated with less respect by the city as a result of their income or their wealth**

This year we have reconvened with the aim of:

- **Looking back** at the changes seen in Edinburgh since that initial inquiry five years ago, and
- **Looking forwards** to consider the changes the city needs to see between now and the end of this decade if it is to meet those 2030 targets.

Headline findings

Throughout the past 12 months, the evidence we have gathered has shown us that:

- **Poverty rates in Edinburgh have remained largely unchanged in the past five years. Like Scotland as a whole, the city remains some way off meeting its 2030 poverty reduction targets and that,**
- **Meeting Edinburgh's poverty targets means lifting 36,000 people, including 8,000 children, out of poverty in this city by 2030.**

The key change we have seen since 2020 has been an increasing complexity and depth of poverty experienced by people in this city – as evidenced by increasing homelessness, increasing destitution, food insecurity, and increased difficulty people experience in escaping from poverty.

This increasing complexity is due in large part to global and macro-economic factors arising from the persistent effects of covid, the cost-of-living crisis, and increasing pressures on the public and voluntary sector services on which people in poverty depend.

From this inquiry we have heard evidence of the complex interactions between health and the experience of poverty, on the links between a poverty crisis and the climate crisis, and on the experience of poverty among marginalised groups in the city.

These are not challenges faced by Edinburgh alone, or problems that can be solved entirely from within Edinburgh. The response to poverty in Edinburgh needs to come from a strong and refreshed collaboration between governments - which hold the levers needed to tackle those macro issues – and the local public sector bodies, employers, and third sector organisations – which hold the relationships needed to make an impact on the lives of individual people in poverty.

More so than ever, we also find that there is no solution to poverty in Edinburgh without resolving the city's housing and homelessness crisis. And there is no solution to that housing crisis without additional investment in the city from Scottish Government.

Solutions that we know can work

The story and the statistics in this report describe a challenging picture. Alongside this story, however, we also see evidence that brings hope and encouragement that there are solutions to poverty already in place here, and that the challenge for the next five years is to build on these solutions and accelerate their progress.

We have seen:

- Good practice to build on through empowering people with lived experience of poverty to influence and drive decision making
- Progress in the availability of fair work in Edinburgh – the proportion of people working for low pay has halved, while employability support has helped 28,000 people into work or learning
- The importance of the social security system – the Scottish Child Payment is helping keep families out of poverty, while local money advice teams helped people on low incomes to £100m of financial gains over the past five years.
- Good preventative action during a housing crisis – local teams helped prevent over 4,300 people from becoming homeless over the past two years, and

- Examples of good practice and innovation in the relationship-based, person-centred support needed to help people find their way out of poverty

2025 Calls to Action

These, and other examples show us that while **poverty in Edinburgh is real, and it is damaging, it is not inevitable, and it can be solved.**

For this 2025 report, we have updated and refreshed the calls to action we made five years ago. Our key finding of this inquiry is that there has been some, but not enough, progress to meeting our calls to action in the past five years, and that the **next five years need to be a period of accelerated delivery and demonstration of impact.**

Once again, we conclude that the heart of the solution to poverty in Edinburgh needs to be a commitment to providing **‘the right supports in the places people live and work’**. And we reiterate in this report our finding from 2020 that **“to end poverty in the city, the pre-condition and the single biggest transformation Edinburgh could achieve would be to make the experience of seeking help less painful, more humane, and more compassionate”**.

Meeting that goal requires a sustained commitment to implement the city’s plans for local poverty prevention partnerships, but to do so with a new commitment to fair funding for the third sector organisations people in poverty rely on, and a long-term programme of co-design with people with lived experience of poverty.

Alongside that core challenge, our calls to action provide a road map for the city and its national government partners to follow to ensure that people in poverty in Edinburgh can enjoy:

- **Fair work** that provides dignity and security
- **A decent home** we can afford to live in
- **Income security** that offers a real lifeline
- **Opportunities** that drive justice and boost prospects
- **Connections** in a city that belongs to us, and
- Equality in our **health and wellbeing**.

These calls to action cannot all be implemented immediately, but they need to be taken forward with urgency and pace. Over **the next six months** our challenge is for:

- The City of Edinburgh Council and all other local public bodies to review and respond to these calls to action in their upcoming budget decision making processes,

- Edinburgh Partnership to embed these calls to action within the current refresh of its Local Outcome Improvement Plan, and
- Scottish and UK Governments to review and respond to these calls to action in their upcoming strategies for reducing poverty

We remain convinced that Governments, the Council, public sector agencies, employers, investors, third sector organisations and citizens can ALL make choices now that will lead to an end in poverty in Edinburgh. The next five years offers an opportunity to make those choices and help thousands of people avoid a life in poverty in Scotland’s most affluent city.



Foreword – Five years on

We are five years on from the Edinburgh Poverty Commission setting out our calls to action for the city in [A Just Capital](#). Published between two Covid lockdowns, Commission members could not have anticipated the long shadow of the pandemic on people’s lives, or the impact of the cost-of-living crisis that followed.

While the calls to action were made to meet the challenges of poverty in 2020, members knew the work had to carry on and go deeper. The baton was passed to a new group of citizens with first-hand experience of the key issues - [End Poverty Edinburgh](#) (EPE) – to hold the city to account. Each year since, EPE members supported by Poverty Alliance have engaged with decision-makers and prepared their own commentary on the city’s progress. In Spring 2024, EPE and many of the original Commission members agreed to combine forces, taking a fresh look at how far Edinburgh has moved towards a set of 2030 targets. We have done that together: as a fully independent exercise and with the support of an expert secretariat offered by City of Edinburgh Council. We have met with grassroots organisations and public service directors, reviewed the data, and looked ahead to where the city needs to be.

The picture is distinctly mixed. We cannot say things have got better city-wide. Some things have become tougher: not least the scale of temporary accommodation use as a raw sign of the housing crisis. Too many people are still going from pillar to post to access the range of services and support they need. Working and funding in silos makes it harder to seek and receive help when it is most needed. Too many voluntary organisations at the frontline of the challenge everyday are stretched to breaking point.

Overall, Edinburgh is not on track to solve poverty. Poverty levels appear to have flat-lined. We are not seeing modest progress on child poverty as witnessed across most of Scotland. Well over 80,000 people in the city struggling to get by. For a growing number, hardship is deeper and more enduring. For too many people and places, hope and trust are in short supply. For this to be the story of a wealthy city is neither acceptable nor inevitable.

At the same time, it is also true that we have seen signs of positive change. Low pay has fallen steadily: the story of in-work poverty is strongly related to not enough hours or security of work. Greater dignity in Scottish social security is being experienced. Income maximisation support has been embedded in health and education services. Powerful collaborative work is being done at neighbourhood level, demonstrating what can be achieved when support is personalised, flexible

and holistic. Diverse communities have shown what they can do to change the landscape for people in, and at risk of, poverty. Anti-stigma capability is developing in the public service workforce. Early but decisive steps are being taken to prevent homelessness, although against a fast-rising tide of need. We know that these gains are patchy and fragile. Momentum slips all too easily if collective will is not renewed.

We present this report without fear or favour. That this review has taken place at all is a mark of the city's commitment. Rarely has a local poverty commission's work stayed in the forefront of minds, navigated changes of leadership, and maintained the participation of experts by experience. EPE has brought new and richer perspectives on the last five years and what now needs to happen. For things to improve, this needs to go further. It is to the credit of everyone who has stayed the course in the last five years.

Against the odds, we have found enough determination in the city to believe that the original calls to action can still be achieved by 2030. Longer-term and flexible funding, true collaboration between sectors and new forms of accountability are required for these examples to achieve their real impact. This is a time for renewed commitment from those we elect at local, Scottish and UK levels, via investment in social housing, education, fair work, social security, equity in education, health and social care and a just transition. There is no sustainable route to ending poverty otherwise.

Finally, we want to thank all EPE and Commission members, all who contributed to the review process and especially Chris Adams, Eleanor Cunningham, Devika Ponnambalam, and Steven Drew who have brought care, compassion and wise words throughout.

Jim McCormick & Linda Craik

Co-chairs of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission

Our purpose and principles

Our purpose

In September 2020, the Edinburgh Poverty Commission published a report – [A Just Capital](#) - setting out the findings of our inquiry into the causes of and solutions to poverty in Scotland’s capital city. In that report, we made a call to action for everyone who has a stake in the city’s future – its citizens, its public agencies, community organisations and businesses – to work together to **end poverty in Edinburgh by 2030**.

To mark the mid-point of that journey, the Commission has reconvened during 2025 with a mission to:

- **Look back** at the changes seen in Edinburgh since that initial inquiry five years ago, reviewing progress, noting the areas where our calls to action are being delivered, seeking out evidence on what has worked well, and the challenges the city has faced, and
- **Look forwards** to consider the changes the city needs to see between now and the end of this decade. This means taking the opportunity to refresh our original calls to action so they stay relevant and deliverable in the current context of the city, looking at new evidence and new issues that have come to light since our original work, and to thinking about issues to which we might, with the benefit of hindsight, have given more emphasis.

We took on this task with the intention of **recognising and celebrating** the efforts of organisations and workers across Edinburgh who are at the frontline of helping people struggling to get by in Scotland’s most affluent city. While doing so, we intend for this report to:

- Offer an **honest and truthful** picture of the changing nature of poverty in Edinburgh
- Provide a clear reference point and **rallying call** for everyone who wants to eradicate poverty in this city
- Provide additional **independent insight** to the ongoing scrutiny carried out through the city’s annual local child poverty action reports,
- Help shape critical transformation and poverty prevention programmes currently underway within the **City of Edinburgh Council** and the **Edinburgh Partnership**, and
- Offer insight and analysis of a key issue for the city in advance of **elections to take place across Scotland in 2026** and in **Edinburgh in 2027**.

This 2025 inquiry has been carried out by the original Edinburgh Poverty Commission members working in partnership with [End Poverty Edinburgh](#) – a group of citizens established as a legacy of the commission’s 2020 report who seek to influence decision-making, and hold the city to account for its end poverty actions.

This approach means that, even more than in our 2020 work, this report and our findings are the result of close collaboration between people with real lived experience of poverty in Edinburgh, and people with real experience of making changes and delivering projects that aim to end poverty in the city

As a mark of that partnership, the review process and this final publication has been co-chaired and convened by **Jim McCormick**, Chair of the 2020 Edinburgh Poverty Commission, and **Linda Craik**, nominated representative from the End Poverty Edinburgh citizens group

A full list of commission members who led this process is provided at the end of this report.



End Poverty Edinburgh members

Our principles

As in 2020, our work is guided by the following core principles. We believe that:

- **Poverty in Edinburgh is real, and it is damaging, but it is not inevitable, and it can be solved.**
- **People who are struggling to get by must be supported to move out of poverty quickly, take control of their lives, and contribute to a city where people look after each other**
- **Practical solutions to poverty can only be designed and delivered alongside people who experience poverty**
- **Our aim should not merely be to ‘tackle’, ‘reduce’, ‘address’, or ‘mitigate the effects of’ poverty. Our aim should be to end poverty in Edinburgh**
- **Governments, public sector bodies, employers, investors, third sector organisations and citizens can all make choices now that will contribute to an end in poverty in Edinburgh.**

Five years on from our original work, these principles remain true and more important than ever. But for many people we have met during our 2025 inquiry, they feel more difficult to believe than they did before. For those who have lived through and worked to help people survive the combined lingering effects of the Covid pandemic, a cost of living crisis, rising operating costs, and a housing and homelessness emergency in Edinburgh, it can be hard to have faith that poverty in this city can be solved, and that the tools to do so are available in a way that is practical and meaningful. In many of the conversations we have had over the past 12 months we have heard frustration and in some cases anger at a lack of progress, and a sense of despair at a system that moves too slowly, in which every step forward is hard earned and accompanied, too often, by at least one step back.

We have heard that frustration and we understand it. We have also seen evidence of good work that is already happening and already lifting people out of poverty, of real changes in practice that live up to the intentions of our 2020 calls to action, of data and modelling that encourages optimism, and of real ambition to make the next five years one of accelerating delivery and progress.

Through this report we aim to reflect all sides of these conversations, and all aspects of the evidence we have gathered. We aim to present a balanced view on the changes seen in the city since our 2020 report – both for good and for bad – and to provide a pathway, practical and deliverable, for the city to take over the next five years.

What we have learned

Over the past 12 months we have come together at five thematic roundtable events, at six project visits, at two annual End Poverty Edinburgh conferences, and numerous other discussion sessions across Edinburgh. We have reviewed the written evidence sent to us through our online call for evidence, we have scrutinised the annual poverty reports published by City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian, and we have reviewed evidence and research published by our allies across the UK – including reports from the Scottish Government, the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Resolution Foundation, Save the Children Scotland, the Poverty Alliance, the End Child Poverty Coalition, Public Health Scotland, Fraser of Allander Institute, and others.

From all that evidence, and all those conversations the story we have heard can be condensed into two, apparently contradictory statements. On the one hand we heard that **“not enough has changed, in fact things are getting worse.”** And at the same time, we heard that **“there are solutions to poverty, and we can see them working”**.

“I was made to feel like I was greedy and that I was begging and felt that I was entitled to special treatment. The assessors who meet you don’t even look at you much ...You don’t feel human. I was treated like I wasn’t trying hard enough.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

The truth that both these statements reflect is one in which the picture of poverty has become more complex in the past five years. This trend was already in place at the time of our last report but has accelerated and become clearer in the past five years. This is a picture in which total poverty numbers are remaining unchanged, but the experience of poverty is becoming deeper and harder, with more people at risk of outright destitution at times. It is a picture where the challenges faced by people in poverty, particularly relating to housing and health, are yet more entrenched and difficult to overcome.

“It’s more than a support service...it’s a living, adaptive system that responds to people’s needs”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

The changing picture of poverty in Edinburgh

“Edinburgh has a distinctive profile of poverty that is different from other cities in Scotland...The majority of people living in poverty in Edinburgh are of working age, in employment, living in rental accommodation, with the highest rates experienced by families with children. Such families live in every area of the city, in every type of neighbourhood and community. The majority of people in poverty in Edinburgh do not live in those areas commonly considered as ‘deprived’. Very often these families will be affected by illness, disabilities and mental health problems brought about either as a cause or a consequence of the poverty they experience.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission, *A Just Capital: Actions to End Poverty, 2020*

The evidence we have gathered throughout our 2025 inquiry – the detailed findings of which are provided in the Data and Evidence paper published as a companion to this report – show us that the fundamental shape and structure of poverty in Edinburgh remain largely the same as they were during our initial inquiry in 2020. Within that picture however, our analysis shows some distinct changes and new perspectives that the city needs to respond to over the next five years.

Poverty rates in Edinburgh are largely unchanged since 2020 and remain far above the headline targets we set for 2030. 17% of people in Edinburgh were living in poverty in 2024, including 21% of all children (16% and 20% in 2020)ⁱ. That represents 89,000 people in total, including 18,000 children. Edinburgh is one of few local authorities in Scotland not to have seen a drop in child poverty rates after housing costs since the full rollout of the Scottish Child Paymentⁱⁱ. This is most likely due to the higher than average cost of housing in Edinburgh, since there is some evidence to suggest that poverty levels before housing costs have fallen slightly in the most recent period covered by data.

But the experience of poverty has become more severe and more complex for many people. The proportion of people in Edinburgh who were destitute – i.e. had to go without basic essentials such as food, shelter, heat, light, clothing and toiletries – rose by 15% between 2019 and 2023ⁱⁱⁱ. At the same time, levels of persistent poverty – measuring the length of time people remain on low incomes – has risen in the most recent period for which data is available.

Meeting Edinburgh’s poverty targets means lifting 36,000 people, including 8,000 children, out of poverty in this city by 2030.

The city is still feeling the long-term effects of the covid pandemic and the cost of living crisis. As at October 2025 food prices in the UK are 57% higher, and electricity prices 48% higher than they

were in September 2020^{iv}, while median wages in Edinburgh have grown by only 21%^v. And the effects of these crises remain visible in data on benefits claimants, physical and mental wellbeing, and school attendance rates.

Edinburgh’s housing crisis is even more severe than it was in 2020. Since our 2020 report, Edinburgh has formally declared a housing emergency. The number of open homeless cases in Edinburgh is now almost double the level it was in 2020, with a 40% increase in the time taken for a case to be closed. At the same time, a 40% increase in construction costs has led to a slow down in the rate of new house building, alongside a reduction in Scottish Government grant funding for new affordable homes in 2024/25. Meeting the levels of house building set out in Edinburgh’s 2025-30 Strategic Housing Investment Plan would need a 250% increase in investment from the Scottish Government and other sources.^{vi}

“Housing for people without permanent homes is critical... Edinburgh needs serious investment in new social housing for single people as well as families. This should be a wealthy city... yet local homelessness levels are shocking. It is so unfair and unequal.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

Essential support services are under increasing pressure. During our conversations with organisations operating in poorer parts of Edinburgh we heard about increasing pressures on core essential public services such as health services, mental health and money and welfare advice supports, and about increasing waiting times for help. All these pressures are contributing to a system which misses opportunities to help people before a problem escalates to crisis, and increases the complexity of situations with which support workers have to help people.

“Most of those on benefits also have health issues, whether mental or physical. Many would work more, but cannot due to the setup of the benefits system and the punitive way it operates. Social work is on its knees and drowning”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

Work alone is not always a sufficient protection against poverty. Edinburgh has made good progress in reducing the number of people in the city who experience low pay, but still 61% of people living in poverty are in a household where at least one adult is working. 15,000 people in Edinburgh are in work but still depend on Universal Credit to top up their income^{vii}.

“Providing a safety net ... is the right thing to do but it needs to be accompanied by meaningful opportunities to work and contribute to society. Pay people a decent wage and they won't need benefits.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

Many of the city's third sector organisations are in a struggle to survive. Local charities, social enterprises and community organisations in Edinburgh provide some of the most important and effective solutions to poverty. Long term structural challenges, alongside rising running costs and funding insecurity mean that the current operating environment has been described by several third sector executives as the worst time they have ever experienced for the sector in Edinburgh^{viii}.

The experience of seeking help in Edinburgh is still, too often, difficult, frustrating and complex.

Despite many examples of good working practices and real improvements, too many people still find it hard to find the support they need at the time they need it. We heard the experiences of people who said the support they received had been 'lifesaving' when it arrived but could have avoided years of pain and misery if they had found it earlier.

“Overall, I have felt angry, stressed out, distressed, worried...I felt that little regard was made for my health or situation. No decency, respect or dignity was shown for much of time either.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

Black and minority ethnic people in Edinburgh face unacceptably high rates of poverty. Poverty rates among Black and Asian people are more than double that of the white British population – 50% of mixed, black or black British people, and 43% of Asian or Asian British people in Scotland live in relative poverty – while rates of severe or deep poverty are almost three times as high as the white British population^{ix}.

Age, disability, caring responsibilities and parenthood all affect the risk of poverty for people who live in Edinburgh. Highest poverty rates are seen among lone parents, parents of young children, young parents, large families, and households with a disabled family member. In many cases poverty rates for these groups are twice as high as the average for the population as a whole. Even though poverty rates for pension age people are lower than average, the impacts of poverty among older people remain significant, making health conditions work, increasing loneliness, isolation and increasing vulnerability and stigma.

We don't like going [to the food bank] every week. Being honest, all my life I've never been someone to rely on somebody else. You never think when you're younger, that when you get older, things are going to change. It actually feels embarrassing.^x

Poverty is a gender issue too. Across all these statistics women are more likely to be represented in high risk groups, and women led households more likely to experience issues such as low pay, in-work poverty, caring responsibilities, and high food insecurity.

The climate crisis is a crisis for people who live in poverty and there is no end to poverty in Edinburgh without actions that make the city more resilient to climate risk. Edinburgh is already experiencing increased risk of severe flooding from intense rainfall, rising river flows, storm damage, and heatwaves all of which exacerbate the experience of poverty in Edinburgh by increasing costs, increasing health risks, and disrupting lives.

Solutions we know can work

“To be transformative we need to look beyond benefits and employment...we've been surprised by how much trauma we're dealing with and how many people who have talked about being suicidal”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

The story and the statistics set out above describe a challenging picture in which not enough progress has yet been made to show that Edinburgh is on course to meet the targets we set it for 2030. Alongside this story, however, we also see evidence that brings hope and encouragement that there are solutions to poverty already in place in this city, that the challenge for the next five years is to build on them, and that there is learning and experience from elsewhere in Scotland that Edinburgh can benefit from.

In fact, our evidence review shows that the city can lay claim to some of the best and most innovative examples of action to end poverty taking place anywhere in Scotland. We are convinced that because of those actions, and because of the commitment of those organisations, poverty in Edinburgh today is lower than it otherwise would be, and that many thousands of lives in this city are better off because of them

From our discussions with city leaders and senior officials in the public and third sectors, we see evidence of the seriousness with which the challenge of poverty is understood, as well as engagement and ambition to meet this challenge. The task for the next five years is to make sure this ambition is followed with tangible actions and delivery.

From our analysis of current activity across Edinburgh and elsewhere, we see many examples of solutions that we know can work, if they are deployed at the right scale and at the right pace and with the right resources.

And from the data and modelling provided by research institutes, we can see evidence of the impact that policy and practice can have on the level and experience of poverty across Scotland.

“Prevention needs to go beyond a single focus. ...Discussions that are poorly targeted or siloed in miss what people’s most urgent needs are...We don’t know what’s going to emerge in chatting with people and this has included people revealing towards the end of their discussion that they’ve been feeling suicidal.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

In particular, we see evidence of:

- Good practice to build on through **empowering people with lived experience of poverty** to influence and drive decision making
- Progress in the availability of **fair work in Edinburgh** – the proportion of people working for low pay has dropped, while employability support has helped 28,000 people into work or learning
- The importance of the **social security system** – the Scottish Child Payment is bringing poverty rates down in Edinburgh, while local money advice teams helped people on low incomes gain £100m over the past five years.
- Good **preventative action** during a housing crisis – local teams helped prevent over 4,300 people from becoming homeless over the past two years, even while **investment in social housing** remains the critical solution to poverty in the city
- Examples of good practice and innovation in the **relationship-based, person-centred support** needed to help people find their way out of poverty

“It’s an interesting feeling, I feel like I do something very big. I feel like I can change this world. This group does a very big job for all people who live here, and I hope it can make life better.”

End Poverty Edinburgh member

Empowering people with lived experience

We are particularly pleased to see the progress that has been made in Edinburgh to improve the **influence and voice of people with lived experience of poverty**. Our assessment is that the best, the most impactful, and the most cost effective solutions to poverty are rooted in a deep understanding of the lives of the people they are designed to support. That understanding can only come when people with experience of poverty have a voice in the shaping of those solutions, and Edinburgh has some of the best examples in Scotland of this approach.



At the end of our 2020 inquiry, we handed the baton for continuing our work to the **End Poverty Edinburgh** Citizen’s Group. That group has grown in strength and influence over the past five years and is now a firm part of the city’s end poverty infrastructure, supporting change and holding the city to account for its actions and decisions. Since 2020 the group have held annual conferences, hosted elections hustings, made films, contributed to the design of local and national programmes, ran learning sessions, built relationships with city leaders, and made their voice heard at gatherings and meetings across Scotland – from the First Minister’s child poverty summit, to Committee hearings at Westminster, to Council deputations, to partnership with small local charities.

This success is due to the determination, tenacity, and talent of its members and the team at the **Poverty Alliance** who support them. The challenge for the next five years is for the city to help the group to continue its work, and to take full advantage of the resource they represent.

Other examples of initiatives that have followed the same path in the past five years, investing the care and resource to hear and work with people with lived experience of poverty, and on which the city must continue to build include:

- The **Whole Family Equality Project** established by Capital City Partnership to involve people from recent migrant and ethnic minority communities in design, commissioning and training for employability and skills programmes across Edinburgh, and
- The [Regenerative Futures Fund](#) – a ten-year community fund that puts decision-making power into the hands of those who are most often excluded. This programme, which arose in part in response to our 2020 report, is working to establish a £15m fund to provide long term security of funding for a cohort of community organisations working to improve the lives of people living in poverty or experiencing racism, and contribute to climate justice. A key feature of the programme is that all decisions about allocation of funding are being made by its panel of Edinburgh citizens with lived experience of poverty or racism.

Fair work as a route out of poverty

In-work poverty levels are still too high in Edinburgh, but it remains true that good, secure, well paid work remains the best and most sustainable route out of poverty for most people.

The latest data on flows in and out of poverty in the UK shows that 41% of people who raised their incomes above the poverty threshold during 2021 to 2023 did so thanks to an increase in earned income. The same data also shows the importance of increasing ‘work intensity’ among people in low income – 16-27% of people were lifted out of poverty due to an increase in the number of workers in their household, or an increase in the number of people moving from part time to full time work. At the same time, a fall in earnings was cited as a key factor for 39% who fell into poverty during the same period^{xi}.

Significant progress has been made on this challenge in Edinburgh over the past five years, both in terms of raising pay levels for people on low incomes and helping people to move into paid work.



Our 2020 report called for “**Edinburgh’s employers, Trades Unions, social enterprises, and public sector bodies ... to come together in a new collective to make Edinburgh a Living Wage City**” and aim to at least double the number of living wage accredited employers in the city.

This call was met by the [Edinburgh Fair Work Action Group](#), who work with Living Wage Scotland and other partners to promote, celebrate, and encourage employers in Edinburgh to adopt and offer fair work practices. Since 2021, the movement has helped encourage almost 400 additional employers to reach real Living Wage status and is on track to meet its target of 500 new accreditations by the end of 2026.

Alongside this, we note that the City of Edinburgh Council responded to our calls to action to apply **Fair Work First** principles across all regulated procurement activity, and mandating the payment of a real living wage to all new regulated contracts. In 2024/25, 93% of Council suppliers were paying a real Living Wage, up from 79% in 2019/20^{xii}.

These trends are resulting in real progress for workers. In 2018/19 we saw that 15% of all workers in Edinburgh earned an hourly pay rate below the real Living Wage level. By 2023/24 this had fallen to only 6%^{xiii}. While this has not been enough by itself to significantly reduce rates of in-work poverty in the city, it does represent a significant improvement in the period since our initial inquiry and it suggests that the priorities for the city over the next five years should be to maintain that progress, and take steps to make sure these improvements in low pay are met by improvements in the number and security of hours worked by people on the lowest incomes. Towards this, we are

encouraged to see the number of Edinburgh businesses who are committing to [Living Hours](#), [Living Pensions](#), and [B-Corps](#) status – all of which include at their core that commitment to stability of income for Edinburgh’s workers.

Alongside this work, the city and government have responded to our calls for strong investment in employability support to make sure that **“anyone out of work in the city can access the support they need to progress”**. **More than 28,000 people have been helped into work or learning over the past five years** by Edinburgh’s employability providers. Co-ordinated by **Edinburgh’s Local Employability Partnership**, this work has included specific programmes designed to support parents into work, provide help with accessing childcare, and provide bespoke, person centred support for people with disabilities, new Scots, and people from black and minority ethnic communities.

Analysis published in the past year demonstrates the significant impact that increasing pay and work intensity can have on poverty numbers in Scotland. Modelling from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) shows that an **increase in the number of parents in work, and the number in full time work, has the potential to lift 60,000 children out of poverty across Scotland by 2030/31^{xiv}**. On a simple pro-rata basis, this could equate to over 4,000 children in Edinburgh alone, or half of the number the city needs to meet its 2030 targets.



Edinburgh’s living wage action plan was launched in November 2021

The importance of a strong social security lifeline...

In our 2020 report we said that **“The UK’s Social Security system is a critical lifeline which supports almost all of us at various times in our lives and is part of a wider system of public services – like education, roads, and the police - that we all rely on to maintain a decent standard of living.”**

Since that time, we have seen clear evidence of the power of the social security system to lift people out of poverty. Over 2021-23, data shows us that 38% of people exiting poverty did so while experiencing a rise in the benefits payments they were able to access. The same data, however, also shows us that a drop in benefits payments was associated with 43% of people who fell into poverty during the same period^{xv}. The challenge for the next five years must be to make sure that social security offers a strong foundation for people to progress, protecting people from unacceptable living standards, while also offering the predictability and security that prevents a fall back into poverty.

The best single example of social security as a game changer for people in poverty in recent years has been the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) and, more generally, the development of Social Security Scotland (SSS). As the JRF and End Child Poverty Coalition note, the most recent years have seen a divergence in child poverty rates between Scotland and the rest of the UK - Child Poverty rates in Scotland dropped by 1 percentage point in the most recent year, compared to no change across the UK – with this diversion corresponding with the introduction of SCP^{xvi}.

At the same time, policies implemented by SSS through the roll out of SCP and the Adult Disability Payment, have been welcomed for treating people with dignity and respect, and for their commitment to embedding support for applicants in local communities.

This progress is welcome, but more is needed if Scotland, and Edinburgh, are to meet its child poverty targets. Towards this, we are encouraged by the work of the **Minimum Income Guarantee Steering Group** which this year published its roadmap of the steps needed to deliver a fairer and more equitable social security system in Scotland.

A **Minimum Income Guarantee** is not a Universal Basic Income, but represents a range of policy reforms needed to *ensure “that no one falls below an agreed income level set to allow everyone to live a dignified quality of life, offering financial security and unlocking opportunities for all”*. This This income level would be achieved through a combination of **fair and accessible paid work, reform on costs, high-quality services and stronger social security**. Each component must work together in harmony; if one element of it is underdelivering then the Minimum Income Guarantee will have less of an impact. ^{xvii}.

Critical steps within this pathway include the removal of the current 2-child limit on child benefits, increases to the Scottish Child Payment, and removals of waiting periods and other unfair penalties built into Universal Credit, and an increase in the overall value of benefits sufficient to meet a basic minimum level required to meet essential living standards.

We know that changes like these can have a profound impact on people's lives and directly lift people out of poverty. Modelling published by the JRF shows that **an increase in SCP to £40 per week could lift 10,000 children out of poverty by 2030/31^{xviii}**. Further modelling by the Fraser of Allander Institute shows that an additional increase to £55 per week, alongside other measures such as the removal of the 2-child limit, could reduce child poverty rates by 6 percentage points, taking Scotland half-way towards its child poverty targets^{xix}.

...and a strong local social security infrastructure

Changes to social security at a national level, however, will not have the full impact they need without the support of a strong delivery infrastructure at the local level, both across Edinburgh, and within its individual communities. Put simply, people do not benefit from social security reforms if they do not have the support they need to access their entitlements.

Over the past five years **£100m of additional financial gains for people on low incomes** have been secured by members of **Edinburgh's Advice Network** – a partnership of money, welfare and debt advice providers. These include advisors embedded in community settings such as schools, hospitals, GP practices, and in partnership with local foodbanks and other third sector organisations to make sure services are available for people in a place and at a time that meets their needs^{xx}.

These organisations have a critical role in helping people to access all the entitlements available to them through the Social Security system. Modelling by JRF shows that full take up of entitlements would have a significant impact on child poverty rates. **Based on these findings, it is estimated that raising take up of SCP from its current 92% to 100% in Edinburgh could have the effect of lifting some 400 children out of poverty in the city every year^{xxi}**.

Alongside this work, we note the strong progress that has been made in Edinburgh to automate and take action to increase take up of locally administered benefits such as **Free School Meals and Uniform Grants**. Since 2020 these actions have helped increase take up of the benefits by over 50%, helping support over 3,000 more families. At the same time, the Council team have increased support through Scottish Welfare Fund grants by almost 10,000 people per annum since 2020, and delivered a **pension credit uptake campaign**, enabled by a data sharing agreement with the

Department for Work and Pensions (SWP), securing an additional £700,000 to 132 individuals in the city so far^{xxii}.

Actions to prevent homelessness

The city's Housing Emergency Action Plan was refreshed in 2025, with a clear focus on improving supply of and managing demand for housing^{xxiii}. Both sides of that equation are equally important to relieve the pressure the housing system in Edinburgh is currently under, and during our evidence gathering sessions we met and learned about the significant impact being delivered by the Council's Homelessness Prevention team.

The work this team is delivering aligns well to the call to action we made in 2020 for **“early person-centred advice and advocacy services to prevent homelessness, including specific support to help tenants stay in their home when this is a sustainable option”**, and has helped **prevent over 4,300 people from becoming homeless** in Edinburgh in the two years since December 2023^{xxiv}.

This has been achieved by:

- Building strong partnership approaches with third sector partners,
- Using data to help identify and reach out with an offer of support to people at risk of homelessness due to rent arrears or other financial distress
- Developing wrap around support designed for individuals and with the aim of helping people sustain their tenancy in the social or private rented sector
- Building pathways of support to avoid homelessness at key transition points such as leaving hospital or prison, and
- Integrating family and household support and income maximisation support within the homelessness and housing access service to ensure that every person receives the help they need at the time they need it.

Investment in social housing remains critical to solving poverty in Edinburgh

“I have a council house and it's the first house I've actually felt settled in...it's a fantastic area too this is what people need”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

Alongside this work, we welcome other responses to our 2020 calls to action to help people access a decent home in Edinburgh. The short term lets legislation we asked the city to make ‘maximum use of’ has led to the number of whole homes listed on AirBnB dropping by 4,000, city plans have committed to 35% affordable housing contribution from new residential developments of 12 homes

or more in Edinburgh^{xxv}, and we welcome the protections for private renters, and focus on prevention of homelessness outlined in the Scottish Government’s Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Ultimately, however, we know that a route out of Edinburgh’s housing crisis will not happen without investment in new social rented homes for the city. Towards this, we note that:

- The city’s latest Housing Needs and Demand study sets out a need for 24-35,000 new affordable (social rent, mid-market rent, and low-cost ownership) homes in the Edinburgh by 2040,
- The potential for 9,000 of these homes is set out in the city’s Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2025 – 2030, but requires £587 million of grant funding from Scottish Government over the five year period.
- Meeting this plan is highly dependent on Edinburgh securing a significant increase in housing investment from Scottish Government or other sources, and that
- Without this investment neither the city’s housing crisis objectives, nor its poverty targets are likely to be met.



End Poverty Edinburgh in action

Relationship based supports providing routes out of poverty

“We are improving lives one person at a time...we help people make a home for themselves”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

In our 2020 report we said that **“To end poverty in the city, the pre-condition and the single biggest transformation Edinburgh could achieve would be to make the experience of seeking help less painful, more humane, and more compassionate”**.

To achieve that transformation, we also provided a set of actions for the city to deliver to make sure people in poverty can access the **right support in the places they live and work**, where trusted relationships can be built that help people to take control of their lives, and where a solution to an immediate crisis is only the first step towards helping people access all the support they need to stay out of poverty in the long term.

During our 2025 inquiry we have seen that Edinburgh has many organisations which provide precisely this role, delivering effective support that is built around a relationship with people that lasts as long as it is needed.

We heard about the approach taken at the [Thistle Foundation](#) in Craigmillar who support people with disabilities and long-term health conditions to lead good lives so that *“a health crisis doesn’t need to become a life crisis”*. During our inquiry we heard about the patient approach the service offers, taking time to find the right thread to pull on to untangle the complex ball of issues that have led a client to need support. And we heard about their partnership with [Edinburgh Food Project](#) to establish the Craigmillar hub, combining food support with money advice and health and wellbeing support, offering access to a range of help all in one trusted space in their community.

We found similar models in the North of the city where [Fresh Start](#) told us about their approach which has supported 19,000 people in the period since the covid pandemic. Again, by working in partnership with volunteers and organisations from a broad section of the community, Fresh Start offers a range of practical and social support that helps people find their way out of poverty and homelessness. These include access to essential household items to help people keep their home with dignity, volunteer led cooking classes where participants are taught to cook healthy, nutritious meals on a budget, a food growing project which helps people gain confidence and learn new skills, a food pantry, as well as - through the [North Edinburgh Support Services](#) collaboration with three other organisations - advice, information, and one to one support on a range of housing and financial issues.

And we have seen these approaches reflected in Edinburgh’s Whole Family Wellbeing programmes that aim to reduce inequalities and strengthen families before the need for crisis intervention occurs. These programmes, which include whole-family support for children and young people and their parents or carers arose from the work of [The Promise](#) and operate in partnership with families in a trauma-informed manner.

These are just a few examples of the dozens of organisations and projects across Edinburgh that are demonstrating the impact of support that we described in our 2020 report. This is not necessarily a complex model, and it is one that Edinburgh is good at – as exemplified by the work of public sector examples we have seen based in GP practices, locality offices, libraries, schools, and by other third sector examples such as [Edinburgh Community Food](#), [Community Renewal Trust](#), [Grassmarket Community Project](#), [Cyrenians](#), [LIFT](#), [The Ripple](#), [Space at Broomhouse](#) and other organisations who took the time to be a part of our 2020 and 2025 inquiries.

Despite these examples, however, we find that for too many people in the city the experience of seeking help in Edinburgh is still too complex and disorienting. Because of that, we find that for too many people the help they need arrives later than it could have, leaving people in poverty for longer than they need to be.

Over the next five years, our challenge to Edinburgh is to build on the examples of good practice we see in the third sector, and in the public sector, to make these approaches the norm, not the exception for how people access support in Edinburgh.

Towards this, we are encouraged by the recent commitment of the **Scottish Government**, **City of Edinburgh Council**, and the **Edinburgh Partnership** to deliver the reforms needed to improve the way prevention of poverty is embedded throughout the design of public services in the city, and to ensure that third sector organisations have the resources they need to be an equal partner in this model. And we particularly note the commitments made in Edinburgh for locally based models of support which build on the examples we describe above^{xxvi}. There is much to do, however, and the next five years need to a period of acceleration and delivery against these plans.

“In setting up five new Neighbourhood Prevention Partnerships, we can bring key services together under one roof and make support easier to access for local people.”

Cllr Jane Meagher, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council

Our 2025 calls to action

“Ending poverty does not mean Edinburgh becoming a city in which no one ever loses a job or experiences a period of their life on low income. But it does mean Edinburgh being a city where periods of low income are temporary, not permanent traps, where a period of low income does not mean having to go without food, or warmth, or safety. And it does mean Edinburgh becoming a city where the number of people experiencing low income at any given time falls to a level comparable with the highest performing societies in Europe”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission, A Just Capital: Actions to End Poverty, 2020

Headline targets

In our 2020 report we challenged the city to take all the actions necessary to end poverty in Edinburgh during this decade. To do that, we set four specific targets.

To end poverty, Edinburgh should aim to be a city in which:	In 2025, the latest data shows that Edinburgh is a city in which:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one has to go without the basic essentials they need to eat, keep clean and stay warm and dry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some 12,000 households experience destitution every year^{xxvii}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer than one in ten children and fewer than one in ten adults are living in relative poverty at any given time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17% of the population, including 20% of all children, are living in relative poverty (after housing costs)^{xxviii}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No-one lives in persistent poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14% of people have been in poverty for 3 of the past four years^{xxix}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one feels stigmatised, abandoned, or treated with less respect by the city as a result of their income or their wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (No robust data is yet available to measure levels of stigma across the city)

In 2025, the city remains a long way from these targets, just as Scotland as a whole is a long way from meeting the statutory targets for child poverty set by the Scottish Government.

These are undeniably challenging targets, but they remain the right ambition for an affluent city, they are targets that have been or are close to being achieved in other European cities, and we maintain that they remain achievable in Edinburgh.

Showing the way

Since our last report there has been a significant advance in the amount and quality of modelling and research carried out to assess and analyse the path to eradicating poverty in Scotland. Taken together, this analysis - carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Institute of Public Policy Research, the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission, the Fraser of Allander Institute and others - demonstrate that there are a number of policy choices that have the potential to reduce child poverty toward the 10% target set by Scottish Government and, by extension, the local targets we set for Edinburgh.

To take one example, in Spring 2025 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published their '**Meeting the moment**' report – a toolkit to the policy choices available to meet Scotland's 2030 poverty reduction targets^{xxx}. In this analysis, the report shows how a combination of policies to increase incomes from work and social security, particularly when targeted at families, offer the highest impact and most cost-effective paths out of poverty from a Scotland wide perspective. The analysis finds that:

- **Helping more parents into work and into more hours of work** would have a significant impact on reducing child poverty and could bring the child poverty rate down to 14% and lift 60,000 children out of poverty by 2030/31
- **Increasing Scottish Child Payment (SCP) take-up to 100%** at the current rate could reduce child poverty by up to 10,000 children
- **Increasing the SCP** has the best poverty reduction impact per pound. By itself an **increase to £40 per week** would itself bring child poverty rates down by 5 percentage points.
- A further boost to SCP for households with a **baby, a single parent or with a disability** has the potential to lift around 10,000 children out of poverty by 2030/31, with significant improvements in the number of people experiencing severe or very deep poverty, and that
- In combination, these policies have the potential to **reduce child poverty in Scotland to 10% by 2030/31.**

These analyses show that the pathway to ending poverty is difficult and costly, but it is possible, and it does offer the potential of significant public sector cost savings over time. In this section we set out our calls to action for the city, and for governments, to deliver over the next five years to translate this possibility into real change at the local level in Edinburgh.

Measuring progress

We cannot deliver actions to end poverty without the data we need to know what is working.

Over the past five years there have been improvements in the availability of data on poverty in Scotland, with more analysis on deep and severe poverty, and more availability of data on flows in and out of poverty.

This is useful, but it remains the fact that there are still **no robust official statistics available to estimate the headline poverty (after housing costs) metrics for local authorities in Scotland**. The data provided in our analysis, and in the annual reports published by the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian, provide a best estimate of local poverty rates based on a combination of:

- Official data published at the Scotland level based on a UK wide DWP analysis, which provide no sub-Scotland analysis
- Modelled estimates of local child poverty (after housing costs) commissioned by the End Child Poverty Coalition (a campaign group of over 130 UK wide organisations), and
- Modelled estimates of local child poverty also published by DWP which uses a different definition and methodology to the headline measures used by Scottish Government.

Even within these datasets there are significant questions over data reliability and robustness. As the JRF point out in their Poverty in Scotland 2025 report, survey sample sizes used to estimate the headline Scotland wide datasets have dropped by 37% compared to the pre-pandemic period^{xxxi}. This makes it challenging to conduct robust analysis over time, particularly on specific priority sub groups of the population.

At the same time, there are as yet no standard approaches to measure or track changes in poverty related stigma in Scotland, and few examples of good practice or toolkits to use for comprehensive evaluation of the policy programmes needed to address poverty at the local level.

As our initial 2025 Call to Action, then, to end poverty in Edinburgh we need:

- **Better official data on poverty in local areas** that provides clear trend analysis on the number of people and children who live in poverty in Edinburgh and its geographies
- **National and local measures for poverty related stigma**. While most datasets focus on the income aspects of poverty, throughout our work we have highlighted the importance of understanding the experience of poverty, and the degree to which cultural determinants such as stigma and shame prevent policies from having the effects they are designed for.

More work is needed to provide an evidence base on which to assess progress on this measure.

- **An Edinburgh wide approach to evaluating impact of poverty programmes, building the evidence base for what works best to reduce and prevent poverty.** While there are many examples of good evaluations of individual poverty reduction or prevention projects, there is a gap in the knowledge base of how to go about evaluating a comprehensive programme of poverty interventions – i.e. assessing the combined impact of actions to improve work, income security, housing, health and others. Good guidance and toolkits on this kind of evaluation are critical to ensuring that public resources are targeted towards policies that are cost effective, that work, and which combine well as part of a wider strategic programme.

Alongside these calls, we also recognise that the data currently used to assess trends in poverty across Scotland is slow to change, and often backwards looking. The most recent data available as of October 2025, for instance, covers the period to March 2024 – a time lag of 18 months that will be 2 years by the time the next data set is published. This is compounded by the fact that in order to maintain data reliability, a three-year rolling average is typically used for these analyses. That means that when we refer to data up to 2024, that dataset includes events that occurred as early as 2021 – more than four years ago at the time of writing.

Much of this is technical and largely unavoidable, but to help with the task of assessing change in Edinburgh, we want to use the opportunity of this report to offer guidance on associated metrics, which are already in use by local partners, that will provide useful signs of measurable progress in the next five years.

Even if the available headline data does not provide a clear enough signal of change in poverty rates, we will be confident that progress is being made if by 2030 we can see:

- A sustained reduction in the number of people being assessed as homeless
- A sustained reduction in the number of people in temporary accommodation, and where no one is left without suitable accommodation
- A reduction in the proportion of people in work but relying on Universal Credit
- An increase in Scottish Child Payment take-up rates to at least the Scotland wide average
- A drop in the proportion of people citing poor mental health as a barrier to employment
- A sustained reduction in the poverty related attainment gap in Edinburgh
- A sustained reduction in low school attendance rates

Actions to end poverty

“This report is a call to action to all in the city. Our work tells us that the path to ending poverty in Edinburgh starts with a determination to open our eyes collectively to injustice in this city and a commitment to change. This means a change in the relationships employers have with their workers, a change in the relationship between the Scottish Government and Scotland’s capital city, a change in the relationship between public agencies and the citizens they serve, a change in the relationship between public bodies and the third sector organisations they rely on, and a change in the relationships we all have within our communities, and across the city.”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission, A Just Capital, 2020

In our 2020 report we found that a pathway to ending poverty in Edinburgh required the delivery of six calls to action, all underpinned by a city-wide shift change in culture and practice.



We found that ending poverty in Edinburgh meant delivering actions to make sure that everyone in this city can expect:

- **Fair work** that provides dignity and security
- **A decent home** we can afford to live in
- **Income security** that offers a real lifeline
- **Opportunities** that drive justice and boost prospects
- **Connections** in a city that belongs to us
- Equality in our **health and wellbeing**.

We also found that the delivery and success of these actions was dependent on, and enabled by, action to make sure everyone in Edinburgh can access **the right support in the places we live and work**.

Our 2025 inquiry work reaffirms that these are still the right calls to action for this city. Indeed, we recognise that they align with and are supported by the calls for action published and presented over the past five years by allies such as the Poverty Alliance, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Save the Children Scotland, the Resolution Foundation, and many others.

Our key finding of this inquiry is that there has been some, but not enough, progress to meeting our calls to action in the past five years, and that **the next five years need to be a period of accelerated delivery and demonstration of impact**.

We remain clear that while our focus is on Edinburgh, many of the tools needed to fully deliver these actions lie in the hands of the UK and Scottish Governments. And we are aware that the responsibility for delivering these actions locally does not lie solely in the hands of any one body or partnership. Ending poverty in Edinburgh is and needs to be a critical mission for everyone who has a stake in this city's success, both today and in the future. That means the City of Edinburgh Council, and the Edinburgh Partnership have critical role to play. But so do Edinburgh's employers, investors, third sector organisations, community groups, faith groups, and citizens.

“Whether we care to admit it or not, we have been doing the same thing for over 30 years and it's not working. We need to rethink how we do things”

Edinburgh Poverty Commission contributor

The right support in the places we live and work

At the heart of our pathway to ending poverty is a shift in culture, ways of working, and development of the city to make sure that people who are struggling to get by can access the support they need in the ways and the places that work for them. This means:

- Ensuring people in all parts of the city have local, safe, welcoming community spaces where they can connect with others, access the right support for them and make progress at the right pace
- Giving staff at the frontline permission, skills, and capacity to make meaningful connections and develop relationships with people, removing over-reliance on procedural, risk-averse and rule bound approaches
- Empowering staff from a range of services with different skills 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
- Ensuring support enables people to take control of their lives. Addressing immediate needs is only the first step to moving on. Holistic support must also be about helping people and communities to develop their strengths and skills and work towards goals for a better life.

This is the model we prescribed in 2020, and it remains the right model today. We are encouraged by the examples we have seen of this approach being delivered in practice in Edinburgh. And we are encouraged by the city's plans for Neighbourhood Prevention Partnerships – built around small teams, drawing staff from statutory and third sectors, operating at a local level to connect, assess and respond to people's needs - to be developed in areas of need across Edinburgh^{xxxii}.

Over the next five years, our call is for the city to deliver on those plans and ensure that they meet the principles and vision we describe. We know, however, that this work does not live in a vacuum and does not only involve the reform of public sector services. In order to succeed, these plans will need strong third sector organisations that are resilient enough to play its role as an equal partner, and a workforce with the skills, capacity and understanding they need to deliver a different kind of service.

“Councils cannot deliver transformation alone...it is essential that the Scottish Government and Community Planning and third-sector partners support the transformation of local services through more effective collaboration.”

Accounts Commission

2025 Calls to Action - to deliver the right support in the places people live and work, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Make decisions about solutions to poverty with and alongside people with lived experience of poverty**
- **Deliver its plans for five Neighbourhood Prevention Partnerships** and make the examples of good practice we see - of person centred, community led support that helps people escape from and prevent poverty - the standard that everyone across the city can expect.
- **Use the learning from this approach to help all public services adopt ways of working that are more effectively focused on the prevention of poverty**
- **Provide stable, fair funding for the third sector organisations on which the city's communities depend, and**
- **Raise the capacity of workers and employers to understand and respond to the needs of people living with poverty, particularly those from marginalised communities.**

Fair work

Work should be the best route out of poverty, but even in Edinburgh where the proportion of people on low pay is falling and unemployment is low, in-work poverty is still the reality for far too many people.

Over the next five years, we need to see employers from all sectors in Edinburgh continue to pay good wages, but also to deliver more progress on the broader dimensions of fair work – on security and predictability of hours and earnings, on opportunities to progress in work, on respect and dignity.

And we need to see continued progress to help people overcome barriers to employment and progress in the workplace. During this inquiry we heard about the increase in mental health as a barrier to work, and the challenges faced by people working in the gig economy both in earning a decent income, and in finding ways to progress.

We also heard evidence of the challenges faced by migrants and asylum seekers in Edinburgh who are either not able to work, only able to work in restricted 'shortage' occupations or have difficulty having their experiences and skills recognised by employers. We see the challenges these issues bring as important not only for the individuals involved, but also for the cohesion of a wider community. For Edinburgh to be a fair city, everyone who lives here needs to be able to make a contribution to the city's success and see that contribution recognised.

Edinburgh has delivered good progress in the past five years, but the evidence we have seen shows that poverty numbers will only fall if we can succeed in helping more people, particularly parents, people with disabilities, and people from marginalised communities to access good jobs.

Our 2025 calls to action: To deliver fair work that provides dignity and security, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Encourage and support all employers to offer a [real Living Wage](#), predictable hours and earnings, and a workplace where people feel rewarded and respected**
- **Use the levers of all its public agencies and anchor institutions to encourage and incentivise fair work through their employment practices and procurement processes**
- **See the UK Government deliver on its promise to end exploitative zero hours contracts and strengthen employment rights**
- **Lift the ban on work for people seeking asylum in the UK, and**
- **Secure a sustained increase of investment in the employability and skills support needed to help people stay in and return to work** – with a particular focus on supporting parents into more work, people with disabilities, a long term health condition, and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds

A decent home

In our 2020 report we said that **“There is no pathway to ending poverty in Edinburgh without resolving the city’s housing crisis.”** That is more true now than ever.

Neither Edinburgh nor the Scottish Government will meet their poverty reduction targets by 2030 without significant additional investment in new social rented homes, at least to meet the funding gap needed to deliver the city’s strategic housing investment plans. While the city should seek innovative and alternative sources for funding, we do not see a pathway to securing this investment that does not include substantial additional commitments from the Scottish Government.

We note the work that has gone into development of the city’s Housing Emergency Action Plan, and its actions to prevent homelessness, and maximise the available supply of housing in the city. The focus for the coming years again, needs to be one of delivery and acceleration of actions agreed in that plan.

Alongside these, we also see a need for action to help people on low incomes manage and mitigate the risks of climate change – including damage to homes and communities from extreme storms and

flooding, and extremes of heat and cold – which disrupt lives and impose unaffordable costs on people who are least able to bear them.

Our 2025 Calls to action: To deliver decent homes that people can afford to live in, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Secure the additional investment, from the Scottish Government and independent sources, it needs to deliver at least its planned pipeline of new homes over the next five years.**
- **Deliver early intervention action to prevent homelessness and help people maintain their tenancies**
- **Deliver the city’s Housing Emergency Action Plan, and its actions to maximise supply of housing in Edinburgh**
- **Make sure social and private rented homes are well maintained, safe, and affordable to heat**
- **Prepare for and make best use of opportunities to introduce rent control areas in Edinburgh**
- **Adapt homes and local places to reduce the risks of climate change for people in poverty, so that these risks do not place additional costs on people without the resources to respond**

Income Security

The introduction of the Scottish Child Payment and the local actions taken by money and welfare advice providers across Edinburgh have demonstrated the significant power of the social security system to reduce poverty. But we know that levels of benefits payments do not yet provide the secure foundation that people need to escape from poverty, and that:

- Over 75% of people with a disability say that income through social security or work did not meet their needs^{xxxiii}, while three quarters of Trussell foodbank users in Scotland come from households containing a disabled person^{xxxiv}
- Current benefits levels for Edinburgh’s carers are falling well short of the level needed to keep people out of poverty. 28% of all unpaid carers in Scotland live in poverty^{xxxv}
- The 2 Child Limit is a significant driver of child poverty, disproportionately affecting lone parents, families with a disabled household member, and black and other minority ethnic households.

At the same time, we know that not everyone who is struggling to get by in Edinburgh is taking up their full entitlement of social security support. While take up of the Scottish Child Payment in Edinburgh has increased significantly in the last year, and local action to reach out and encourage take up have been effective, we know that across the UK an estimated £16.6bn of four main welfare benefits (Universal Credit, Pension Credit, Child Benefit, and Carers Allowance) remain unclaimed in 2025^{xxxvi}. No official data is available on take up rates at a local level but, using a simple population-based approach to making an estimate, this could equate to over £100m of unclaimed benefits from these sources for people in Edinburgh every year.

Our 2025 Calls to action: For income security that provides a real lifeline, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Provide the secure, sustainable funding needed for Edinburgh’s money and welfare advice providers to deliver high quality support to maximise take up of entitlements, manage debt and boost family prospects**
- **Provide a social security system designed around a [minimum income guarantee](#) that allows everyone to live a dignified quality of life, offering financial security and unlocking opportunities, including commitment to:**
 - **Remove the 2-child limit that restricts support through Universal Credit and Tax Credits to the first two children in a family**
 - **Increase the Scottish Child Payment at levels above the level of inflation every year to 2030**
 - **Ensure disability benefits reflect the true additional costs of being disabled, and provide a supporting pathway back to work for people recovering from a health crisis**
 - **Widen eligibility for and significantly boost the value of the Carers Support Payment for unpaid carers.**

Opportunities

In our 2020 report we said that “Education in Edinburgh is more polarised than anywhere else in Scotland” and that “Despite the significant efforts evident to close the attainment gap, Edinburgh is making slower progress than many other areas in Scotland.”

We are pleased to note the improvements that have been recorded in Edinburgh since we made that statement. The gap in literacy, numeracy, and attainment of qualifications between those who live in the most deprived and the most affluent areas of the city has closed in the past five years.

Most importantly, there is good evidence to show that this has been driven by an increase in achievement among pupils from the city's most deprived communities.

Alongside this, the experience of the last five years shows that young people who experienced the disruption of Covid require greater levels of support to successfully transition from education to working life. We know that failure to swiftly tackle high or rising youth unemployment leads to longer term issues and poorer life chances and we recognise a need for more support to ensure all young people can access the opportunities they need for successful transition from education to employment.

We have heard, again, about the barriers families, particularly mothers, face in balancing the need to earn with the need to care for children - and, along with allies such as New Economics Foundation, with support from Oxfam Scotland and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, we are persuaded by the campaign work of Pregnant Then Screwed and their calls for a [Scottish Childcare Guarantee](#).

And we have heard about the challenges that people for whom English is a second language face in accessing the translation, language and other supports they need to build their future.

Our 2025 Calls to action: To provide opportunities that drive justice and boost prospects, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Strengthen the support available to help young people progress, particularly care experienced young people and those who need mental health support**
- **Continue progress to close the poverty related attainment gap, and to reduce the number of pupils with low school attendance rates.**
- **Deliver a Scottish Childcare Guarantee which make childcare affordable and accessible for everyone who needs it – with expansion of funded hours from 9 months old, so more parents can get back to work or learning more easily – and a cap on the proportion of income families pay on childcare costs.**
- **Improve the availability of and access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, translation and interpretation services needed to help people progress in work and learning.**

Connections

An Edinburgh without poverty would be one in which a lack of income does not mean people feel they do not belong in parts of the city, where people feel a connection to a local area that meets

their needs, where people can afford to get around the city for work, for leisure or to access services, and where people can afford and are able to enjoy a decent digital standard of living.

The importance of the places people live in and move around across Edinburgh has been emphasised as a critical part of the experience of poverty in both our inquiry processes. People talk about the pride they have in their local areas, but also the frustrations they have when those areas don't feel well enough cared for, or where basic essential services are not available. One contributor to this inquiry asked us *"how can we expect people to get on and look after themselves, when the whole place they live is telling them they are not worth it"*. Others told us about how difficult it is to find fresh fruit in their local area, where local shops are closed down, or expensive, and supermarkets are a long walk away, or about the number of bus journeys it takes to reach a medical appointment.

We welcome the commitments the city has made in the period since our first report to embed principles of 20-minute neighbourhoods and walkable communities in Edinburgh's City Plan, and the work done to improve access to the internet and digital devices. And we welcome the introduction of free bus travel for under 22s, and the continued funding of schemes for people over 60. But there is more to do over the next five years and beyond.

Our 2025 Calls to action: To ensure people in poverty have connections in a city they belong to, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Ensure that the planning, design, and maintenance of housing, public spaces, and services addresses the need for quality spaces, leisure and public services in the places where people live**
- **Expand concessionary travel to under 25s, unpaid carers and people on low-income and disability benefits**
- **Listen to the voice of low-income passengers in the city, and ensure routes and timetables adapt to enable people from all communities to participate in the life of the city**
- **Deliver a [minimum digital standard of living](#) including accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need to thrive in a digital world**

Health and Wellbeing

"People living in poverty find it harder to live healthy lives, harder to access NHS services, live with greater illness and die earlier than the rest of the population" Kings Fund, 2024^{xxxvii}

Our work during this inquiry has reaffirmed the previous evidence we gathered on the links between poverty and poor health and wellbeing in Edinburgh. We know that life expectancy rates still vary widely between the poorest and most affluent areas of the city – a boy born in the 20% most deprived areas of Edinburgh today can expect to die 12 years earlier than a boy born in any of the 20% least deprived areas. And we have seen again that people who live in poverty have higher rates of diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and tooth decay. We see also that people in poverty have poorer health outcomes than those who have higher incomes – people who live in poverty, for instance, are less likely to experience dementia than people in higher income groups, but they are more likely to die from dementia if they do develop it.

The causes of these inequalities are complex, but can be considered as a combination of:

- Social and environmental factors – some of the most important building blocks of good health and wellbeing rest on a good job (particularly one that is flexible to a person’s needs or disabilities), a good home, a safe place, a good education, a sense of community, and good local amenities in which to exercise, buy healthy food, and enjoy green spaces.
- Behavioural factors – poverty makes it more difficult to live a healthy lifestyle. A third of people in poverty in Scotland struggle to afford to feed their families properly every week, while the financial, mental health and other pressures of poverty raise the likelihood poor health behaviours such as smoking, gambling, and harmful drug and alcohol consumption.
- Difficulties or delays in accessing health care – poverty makes it more difficult to access healthcare when people need it, due to the cost or time associated with travelling to appointments, or due to challenges in balancing work, care or other responsibilities with making an appointment for healthcare. As a result, people in poverty have higher levels of unmet or unidentified health needs, are less likely to find help at the early stages of a health condition, and are more likely to have difficulty returning to work after a health crisis.

During this inquiry we have seen excellent examples of local responses to these challenges. We have seen GP practices that provide access to wide ranging supports that help people through all aspects of a healthy life – providing financial, mental health, and other social supports all in one place – and we have seen local organisations working to help people build their lives again following a long-term health crisis. It is the challenge of the next five years to take the steps needed to make these supports available in all areas of the city, and to make Edinburgh a city built on healthy communities.

Our 2025 Calls to action: To help people in poverty enjoy equality in their health and wellbeing, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Make sure people in poverty have the access they need to life essentials like healthcare, transport, and learning, so that waiting for these services do not become barriers to people’s progress in life.**
- **Ensure people in poverty in Edinburgh have access to affordable, healthy food, green spaces, and safe community facilities in the places they live and work**
- **Help GPs and other health facilities in all areas of Edinburgh to act as hubs for wider preventative support as seen in the best practice examples we have seen in this city**
- **Support employers provide the flexibility needed to allow people with long term health conditions to stay in or return to work, and**
- **Reduce exposure, particularly for young people, to advertising and sales of health harming products and behaviours including tobacco, vaping, alcohol, gambling, and foods high in fat, sugar and salt.**



End Poverty Edinburgh in Conference

A big thank you

During the past 12 months, leaders and workers in organisations across the city have come together with individuals with experience of poverty to take part in our round table discussions and project visits or have given their views in our online call for evidence. We are grateful to all of you for your time and for sharing your expertise, experience and knowledge with us.

In closing this report, we want to give **a big thank you** for allowing us to describe the experience of poverty in Edinburgh in 2025, and to form our calls for action based on what we've heard and learned from you. **Whatever improvements are made in Edinburgh as a response to this report and its predecessor, they will happen because of you and the clarity with which you have articulated the changes you need to see.**

We want to offer our thanks to the **City of Edinburgh Council**, and the **Edinburgh Partnership** for re-convening the Commission for this 'mid term review'. We want to thank them for the resources and support that have made this work possible, and for their openness, honesty, and willingness to engage positively with the challenging questions this Commission has posed.

Organisations which contributed to this review included:

Community Link Worker Network	Edinburgh School Uniform Bank	Passion4Fusion
Capital City Partnership	Edinburgh Tenants Federation	Project Esperanza
CHAI (Community Health and Advice Initiative)	Edinburgh University	Saheliya
Changeworks	Edinburgh University Students' Association	Salvesen Mindroom Centre
Children First	End Poverty Edinburgh	Score Scotland
Citizen's Advice Edinburgh	Fair Advice	Scottish Government
Community Link Worker Network	Fresh Start	Scottish Climate Intelligence Service
Community One Stop Shop	Home Energy Scotland	Social Security Scotland
Community Renewal Trust	Home-Start Edinburgh	The Action Group
DWP External Relations Leader	Intercultural Youth Scotland	The Data Kirk
Edinburgh Communities	LINKNet Mentoring Limited	The Edinburgh Advice Partnership
Climate Action Network	Multi-cultural Family Base	The Grassmarket Project
Edinburgh Community Food	Living Rent	The Welcoming
Edinburgh Food Project	Mwamba	Thistle Foundation
Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership	Napier University	Verture
Edinburgh Leisure	NHS Lothian	VOCAL
	NKS (Networking Key Services)	Volunteer Edinburgh

Meet the Commissioners

This inquiry has been led and conducted as a collaboration between members of the 2020 Edinburgh Poverty Commission, and members of the End Poverty Edinburgh Citizen's group.

- Jim McCormick (co-chair) CEO at the Robertson Trust
- Linda Craik (co-chair) End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Betty Stone Edinburgh Tenants Federation
- Caroline Cawley End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Celia Tennant Chief Executive of Inspiring Scotland
- Craig Sanderson Former Chief Executive of Link Housing Association
- Darren Cafferkey End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Diana Noel-Paton Former Chief Executive of the Thistle Foundation
- Fred Hessler End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Isename Agbomawena End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Kirsty Bell End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Kirsty Kennedy End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Olena Bovdyr End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Sandy MacDonald Head of Impact, Scottish National Investment Bank
- Stephen Kelly Head of Education, City of Edinburgh Council
- Stuart Kellier End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Uchechi Leonard End Poverty Edinburgh member
- Zoe Ferguson Head of Insight and Impact at the Robertson Trust

The work of the commission has been supported by Chris Adams, Eleanor Cunningham, and Devika Ponnambalam of City of Edinburgh Council, and by Steven Drew of the Poverty Alliance.

Summary of our 2025 calls to action



2025 Calls to Action - to deliver the right support in the places people live and work, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Make decisions about solutions to poverty with and alongside people with lived experience of poverty**
- **Deliver its plans for five Neighbourhood Prevention Partnerships and make the examples of good practice we see - of person centred, community led support that helps people escape from and prevent poverty - the standard that everyone across the city can expect**
- **Use the learning from this approach to help all public services adopt ways of working that are more effectively focused on the prevention of poverty**
- **Provide stable, fair funding for the third sector organisations on which the city's communities depend, and**
- **Raise the capacity of workers and employers to understand and respond to the needs of people living with poverty, particularly those from marginalised communities.**

Our 2025 calls to action: To deliver fair work that provides dignity and security, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Encourage and support all employers to offer a real Living Wage, predictable hours and earnings, and a workplace where people feel rewarded and respected**
- **Use the levers of all its public agencies and anchor institutions to encourage and incentivise fair work through their employment practices and procurement processes**
- **See the UK Government deliver on its promise to end exploitative zero hours contracts and strengthen employment rights**
- **Lift the ban on work for people seeking asylum in the UK, and**
- **Secure a sustained increase of investment in the employability and skills support needed to help people stay in and return to work – with a particular focus on supporting parents into more work, people with disabilities/poor health, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds**

Our 2025 Calls to action: To deliver decent homes that people can afford to live in, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Secure the additional investment, from the Scottish Government and independent sources, it needs to deliver at least its planned pipeline of new homes over the next five years.**
- **Deliver early intervention action to prevent homelessness and help people maintain their tenancies**
- **Deliver the city's Housing Emergency Action Plan, and its actions to maximise supply of housing in Edinburgh**
- **Make sure social and private rented homes are well maintained, safe, and affordable to heat**

- **Prepare for and make best use of opportunities to introduce rent control areas in Edinburgh**
- **Adapt homes and local areas to reduce the risks of climate change for people in poverty, so that these risks do not place additional costs on people without the resources to respond**

Our 2025 Calls to action: For income security that provides a real lifeline, Edinburgh needs action to:

- **Provide the secure, sustainable funding needed for Edinburgh’s money and welfare advice providers to deliver high quality support to maximise take up of entitlements, manage debt and boost family prospects**
- **Provide a social security system designed around a minimum income guarantee that allows everyone to live a dignified quality of life, offering financial security and unlocking opportunities, including commitment to:**
 - **Remove the 2-child limit that restricts support through Universal Credit and Tax Credits to the first two children in a family**
 - **Increase the Scottish Child Payment at levels above the level of inflation every year to 2030**
 - **Ensure disability benefits reflect the true additional costs of being disabled, and provide a supportive pathway back to work for people recovering from a health crisis**
 - **Widen eligibility for and significantly boost the value of the Carers Support Payment for unpaid carers.**

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Edinburgh Poverty Commission

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