

## Poverty Alliance's response to the City of Edinburgh Council's Consultation on Ending Poverty Related Hunger in Edinburgh

November 2022

### Introduction

As the squeeze on household budgets continues to tighten, we welcome the City of Edinburgh Council's investigation into ending poverty related hunger in Edinburgh. This current cost of living crisis is pulling more people into a rising tide of poverty, forcing people into making impossible choices between heating their homes or affording food. These problems are not new to those living on low incomes and the issues related to food insecurity long-predicate the cost of living crisis. Yet, there are things we can do now to help mitigate the damage of this crisis and we welcome the opportunity to explore this.

It is important to highlight that the only way to truly end poverty related hunger is to end poverty. This means ensuring that people have adequate incomes to afford their basic needs through social security, paid employment, or a combination of both, whilst keeping living costs low. We know these issues are not the responsibility of Edinburgh City Council, however there are actions local authorities can take around provision and delivery of support and attitudes towards debt which can make a difference to the experiences of people forced to rely on emergency food provision.

Our response below is based on findings from the *Menu For Change*<sup>1</sup> project and our collaborative work with the End Poverty Edinburgh (EPE) group.

### Consultation Response

The findings from engagement activities carried out to date identify a number of key challenges for people in Edinburgh, and the food crisis networks established to provide support. A summary of these findings shows challenges relating to:

- *High and rising need and demand*
- *Capacity and resources to respond to need*
- *The need for a more strategic approach to commissioning and funding*
- *A need for improved partnership working and collaboration across the sector*
- *Gaps in access, variability of standards*
- *Communication and awareness*

### **2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the challenges that a strategy to end poverty related hunger in Edinburgh needs to address?**

Somewhat agree.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit: <https://amenuforchange.wordpress.com/>

### 3. What other challenges does the strategy to end poverty related hunger in Edinburgh need to address?

We agree that the above listed challenges are some of the central issues in tackling poverty related hunger in Edinburgh. However, a crucial missing element to ending poverty related hunger is tackling the stigma associated with *both* being in poverty and accessing services aimed at supporting people facing poverty related hunger. These services include foodbanks, so-called ‘warm places’, money and debt advice centres etc.

The stigma associated with accessing services aiming to support people on low incomes has significant detrimental impacts to those in poverty. In our 2019 work on the Menu For Change project, a key theme which emerged was that shame acts as a significant barrier to people accessing support even in crisis.<sup>2</sup> Key findings showed that people who used foodbanks for example felt feelings of shame and embarrassment and some felt undeserving of support and chose not to seek help despite being in extreme need.<sup>3</sup>

The impact of stigma on accessing services has been a consistent theme in much of the Poverty Alliance’s engagement and research across many years. In our recent *Get Heard Scotland* publication *Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26: Voices from our Communities*, community organisations working with people on low incomes noted that services aimed at supporting people on low incomes had to avoid being seen as a “service for the poor”<sup>4</sup> as this became stigmatising and acted as a deterrent. Some organisations felt that stigma may even be the biggest barrier in addressing poverty.<sup>5</sup>

These experiences have been echoed in recent research conducted by the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Women’s Budget Group focusing on experiences of the cost of living crisis by women. Initial findings showed that some women would actively attempt to hide the fact that their households were living on a low income by maintaining more expensive clothing for when children were in public, not taking free period products within school settings, shopping increasingly in charity shops, and avoiding accessing settings such as foodbanks to avoid being seen by others.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Addressing Shame as a Barrier to Advice Services for People Experiencing Food Insecurity. A Menu For Change. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Found Wanting: Understanding journeys into and out of food insecurity: longitudinal study. Oxfam Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group, Lottery Community Fund, Poverty Alliance, Nourish Scotland. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26: Voices from Our Communities. Poverty Alliance. 2022.

<sup>5</sup> As above

<sup>6</sup> L. Robertson et al (2022) ‘I don’t live, I survive’ Women’s experience of the cost of living crisis’, October 2022, <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/SWBG-Poverty-Alliance-research-report-final.pdf>

If we are to work towards ending poverty related hunger, services aimed at supporting people in crisis must be promoted in a manner that does not stigmatise those using them. Considering stigma in the design and running of services (such as foodbanks, the administration and delivery of the Scottish Welfare Fund, and welfare/advice services) and involving people with lived experience of poverty in the design and implementation of these services is crucial to ensuring people feel able and willing to use these services.

For example, members of the End Poverty Edinburgh group spoke of a community kitchen aimed at serving upwards of 100 people per night. The group complimented its restaurant style table service as minimising stigma, the inclusion of helpful information for other financial and welfare services as helpful and important, and the kitchen's inclusion of a share and praised the inclusion of a wear station where people can take clothes if needed. However, even where these efforts were being made to reduce the stigma associated with provision of free food, there was still difficulties in completely overcoming the issue. This emphasised the need to continue to focus on the provision of cash first approaches to addressing food insecurity. In addition, greater involvement of people with lived experience in designing services aimed at supporting people living on low incomes is crucial in making these spaces feel safe, judgement free and accessible.

Members of the End Poverty Edinburgh group were also keen to ensure that tackling in-work poverty is central to Edinburgh City Councils ambition to ending poverty related hunger. The council can ensure this by continuing to promote the important work of being a real Living Wage employer, take active steps to consider how to encourage employers to become accredited Living Wage employers, and continuing the important work of moving towards Edinburgh becoming a Living Wage Place.

**4. Do you have any specific examples of how these challenges have affected you, or the services you provide? If so, please describe:**

The EPE group have spoken about the effects of stigma many times, and how simply accessing a service providing support could potentially be stigmatizing depending on how the service is organised and the attitudes of staff. The group has spoken about dignity being ripped away if stigma is present within a service. This can be felt due to feeling judged or blamed for their circumstances, or situations where there is 'gate-keeping' of support through excessive questions regarding whether the person 'needs' support.

**Vision**

**No one in Edinburgh needs to go hungry due a lack of money, that**

- When do people fall into food crisis, Edinburgh networks aim to give a **cash first** approach to providing support
- Where emergency food provision is needed, people can access wider support in ways that are **safe, dignified, respectful**, and **prevent future need**, and that
- **Community food initiatives** are available in all parts of Edinburgh build people's **wellbeing**, improve **skills and confidence**, and help people access the supports they need to get by

**5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the vision set out in this draft strategy? If you disagree with the vision, please tell us why and suggest an alternative vision:**

We broadly support the vision. As detailed in question 2, we believe that the role of poverty related stigma must be included as part of this vision.

For example,

“Where emergency food provision is needed, people can access wider support in ways that are safe, dignified, respectful, *non-stigmatising*, and prevent future need...”

We are particularly glad to see the provision of cash first support being prioritized. Participants in the Menu For Change project noted that when they received cash first support from sources like the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF), they were significantly preferable to going to a food bank or community café as there was the flexibility to not only pay for food but other households essentials.<sup>7</sup>

Cash-first is preferred as it is less stigmatising and allows households with autonomy to manage their household budgets. The provision of cash based support through the Scottish Welfare Fund is presented as positive in many cases where applications are successful, such as in *our Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26: Voices From Our Communities* report. However, not all experiences of the SWF were positive with some participants noting confusion around eligibility criteria and unempathetic administrators of the fund. Moreover, we know that experiences of the SWF vary between local authorities in terms of amount of support allocated, applications being rejected and the timeliness of responses.

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<sup>7</sup> Found Wanting: Understanding journeys into and out of food insecurity: longitudinal study. Oxfam Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group, Lottery Community Fund, Poverty Alliance, Nourish Scotland. 2019

The SWF is most effective at tackling poverty related hunger when grants are made quickly, where applications are easy to engage with, and when decision-making results in high-quality, person-centred decisions. To support these experiences, we need investment in the SWF to improve its administration, whilst enabling better promotion of the fund to people who need crisis support. Quick decisions on SWF applications are crucial to reducing the need for any emergency food aid. For the SWF to be a real alternative to food banks, it needs to reach people the same day or they will need emergency food regardless.

## **Draft principles**

**Delivery of this vision should be guided by four core principles to which all partners and stakeholders are committed:**

- **Led by lived experience**
- **Dignity by design**
- **Shared standards of quality**
- **Equality of access**

**6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right principles to guide the work of the Edinburgh Partnership? If you disagree, please tell us why:**

Agree

**7. What other principles do you think need to be added?**

N/A

**8. Do you have any specific examples of how any of these principles have made (or can make) a difference to you, or the people you support? If so, please describe:**

One member of the End Poverty Edinburgh group highlighted the importance of treating people in a dignified way when accessing services that provide emergency food support. They noted the difference in having that first point of contact be someone who was compassionate and treated others in a way that upholds their dignity. They emphasised that the interactions with the first point of contact is crucially important and can make or break an individual's pursuit of support and help. If someone trying to access a service has a negative first experience with a staff

member or service, it can immediately put them off seeking support for a long time, and subsequently, prolong their time in poverty.

Members of EPE have spoken about the importance of the principle around equality of access – whether that be to the physical space, or access to the internet.

On digital access, Covid-19 highlighted both the scale and complexity of digital exclusion for low income households. The most recent data from the Scottish Household Survey showed that only 87% of those in the most deprived areas of Scotland had access to the internet compared to 99% of those in the least deprived areas in Scotland.<sup>8</sup> At a time when more services providing financial support and advice are moving online, access to good quality, affordable broadband is more than ever an essential need for low-income households helping them to maximise their incomes and reduce poverty related hunger.

Physical locations of services posed to tackle poverty related hunger must be considered within the context of travel costs. Our research has shown that travel costs can often prevent people on low incomes accessing essential services such as work, advice and education, as well as social connections.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore imperative to efficiently fund and support existing projects based in areas of high deprivation whilst exploring where there are gaps in support for other areas.

## **Proposed actions**

**Engagement and analysis carried out to date suggests five proposed areas of action for Edinburgh Partnership members and stakeholders to prioritise.**

**These include:**

- **Improve networking and collaboration - bringing together the organisations working to end poverty related hunger, and engaging and collaborating with citizens who have lived experience**
- **Maximise capacity and secure sustainable resources - finding ways to share capacity and resources more efficiently, including food, skills, technical resources, warehousing, and to achieve more secure funding**
- **Set agreed standards and principles - for providing food (quality, nutrition and hygiene) and support**
- **Improve accessibility of support by addressing gaps in provision - through collaboration, better data and best practice standards**
- **Improve communication and awareness - through a communication strategy including exploring options for an information hub**

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<sup>8</sup> Scottish Household Survey 2020 - telephone survey: key findings. Scottish Government. 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Transport and Child Poverty – Beyond the pandemic. Transport Scotland and Poverty Alliance. 2021.

**Throughout the consultation period for this draft strategy further work will be undertaken to further develop and agree these actions, including phasing and resourcing needed for delivery.**

**9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these the right actions for the strategy to focus on?**

Mostly agree

**10. What other actions do you think need added?**

We would encourage the inclusion of a specific action to tackle poverty related stigma as detailed in question 2. An example of this could be to work with community organisations who support people facing poverty related hunger and learn lessons on how to design services that are not stigmatising. Relatedly, there should be greater effort and commitment to including people with lived experience in the design and implementation of such services, and to provide poverty awareness training to all staff in public-facing roles. Work must also be done to support the principle of equality of access to ensure that no one is unable to access support for poverty related hunger due to travel costs or inability to access the internet.

Contextually, it is important to recognize that increasing costs in other areas of life will drive more people to use foodbanks; particularly during the cost of living crisis. One such area we believe that Edinburgh City Council could take immediate action on is the approach to debt collection regarding council tax arrears and school meal debt. Money spent on unmanageable debt levels means people are unable to afford food. We have written more on this in our work around experiences of people living on low incomes with debt which can be read [here](#). Our key recommendation is that local authorities, landlords and lenders should work with the Scottish Government to enact debt forgiveness schemes and practice greater forbearance towards debt in recognition of the way that debt locks people into poverty and drives them to rely on emergency food provision.

**11. What do you see as the challenges in carrying out these actions?**

N/A

**12. What opportunities should we be taking advantage of?**

N/A

## **Who we are**

The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups

This response is in-part shaped by the experiences and views of members of the End Poverty Edinburgh (EPE). EPE are an independent group of Edinburgh residents formed in 2022 to raise awareness of poverty in Edinburgh, influence decision-making and hold the city to account. It was formed during the latter stages of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission as a legacy group to hold the baton in a movement to end poverty in Edinburgh.

## **For more information, please contact:**

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