


Edinburgh councillor blogs – Councillor Scott Arthur

Scott Arthur is Labour councillor for Colinton/Fairmilehead. He is newly elected in May 2017, but has found his feet quickly and has views on many diverse issues.

You can follow him on Twitter [here](#) and Facebook [here](#).

 Here he writes for us about the proposal to increase the School Uniform Grant for Edinburgh's Children

“I joined the Labour Party just under three years ago. When I first joined there were many aspects of the party's culture that I had to learn and respect. One thing I noted quickly was that speakers at events liked to start their speeches with tales of their own humble upbringing and ended by saying how pulling and sharing resources can make a difference. This blog is no different.

“I grew up in a single parent household in one of the most deprived areas of the UK – a council estate in Kirkcaldy during the 1980's miner's strike. My route out of that was to work hard at school and go on to complete a degree and eventually a PhD.

“I was lucky as my family understood the difference education could make to my life chances. This was not because they were well educated themselves, but because they had ability but were not given the same opportunity in the 1940s and 1950's.

“Days off school were not permitted unless a death certificate could be provided, and I was one of only two people from a huge housing scheme (Smeaton) to “stay on” at school for 5th and 6th years. Above all else, a school uniform had to be worn.

“The school uniform was not an easy thing for my father to

provide for me and my two brothers. He had to rely on two aunts and my Gran to help ensure I had one – particularly big ticket items like shoes and a jacket, which often came by way of the Littlewoods Catalogue. I don't remember this being a particularly enjoyable experience – having my clothes bought by a committee – but the end justified the means.

“I had largely forgotten about this experience until the school year started again in August 2017. At that point, the [BBC ran a story](#) on the support available to low income families to help them equip their children for school.

“It outlined how the “School Uniform Grant” varies from £40 (North Ayrshire) to £110 (West Lothian) in Scotland, and how the [Poverty Truth Commission](#) estimates the actual cost to be £129.50 “*even when shopping at supermarkets and bargain stores*”. The story The Poverty Truth Commission told about life in Scotland today was exactly what I had experienced 30 years ago:

“Very often, school clothing grants simply aren't enough to cover even the most basic uniform – leaving families stressed out, anxious and wondering just where the money is going to come from. Some even end up in debt or struggling to afford other basic essentials like food and heating.”

“It made me feel ashamed to know this was still happening in Scotland. Worse than that, I was ashamed because the City of Edinburgh Council offers one of the lowest grants. The grant in Scotland's Capital is only £43 and £50 for primary and secondary school children respectively. Pretty much as soon as I read the BBC report, I donated £129.50 to the [Edinburgh School Uniform Bank](#).

“Why does this matter?”

“It is now an accepted fact that child [poverty is rising in the UK](#). However, we also must accept that The City of Edinburgh Council, The Scottish Government and the UK

Government have a duty to use their powers to reverse this trend.

“In my view a key part of that is ensuring children are equipped to attend school as, I believe, education is key to breaking the kind of poverty which is handed down from generation to generation. With all that in mind, I am delighted to say I have the following motion to review Edinburgh’s School Uniform Grant coming before the [“Education, Children and Families Committee”](#) on Tuesday 10 October. It reads as follows:

Motion by Councillor Arthur – Child Poverty – School Uniform Grant

“Committee:

Recognises that child poverty is rising in Edinburgh and that the City of Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Government and the UK Government have a duty to use their powers to reverse this trend.

Recognises that a significant burden on low income families is providing their children with a school uniform.

Recognises the significant work of the Edinburgh School Uniform Bank, Edinburgh Police Fund for Children, and others to help equip children from low income families for school.

Recognises the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland estimate that the cost of a school uniform is £129.50, but the School Uniform Grant provided by City of Edinburgh Council is only £43 and £50 for primary and secondary school children respectively.

Recognises that the Scottish Government recommends the School Uniform Grant level be set at £70, but many Local Authorities exceed this.

Asks that within two cycles (four months) Council Officers

report on the feasibility of increasing the School Uniform Grant to ensure that from the 2018/19 academic year children from low income households are better equipped for school.”

“The motion has support within the Labour and SNP Groups of Councillors, not least from [Councillor Alison Dickie](#), so I am hopeful that it will be approved and we can take a small step towards ensuring Edinburgh’s children can reach their full potential.

“Last week at an event in East Lothian on “[The Cost of the School Day](#)” project I listened with great pride to all the work The City of Edinburgh Council is doing to ensure finance is not a barrier to education, but I was also ashamed to hear how that lack of a clean uniform that fits can be a barrier to kids reaching their full potential (via an inspiring presentation by Pattie Santelices, Strategic Development Officer for Health & Wellbeing).

“Next to me a West Lothian Councillor whispered that her council had the highest School Uniform Grant in Scotland. I smiled and said I wanted Edinburgh to be the first to meet The Poverty Truth Commission’s target of £129.50.

“Within these financially constrained times, it may not be easy to find the £129.50 for every child that needs it. That’s why we also have to continue to work with third sector partners, [just like Manchester did](#), to ensure every child in Edinburgh is fully equipped to reach their full potential at school.”

