

Opinion – John Donnelly of Marketing Edinburgh on the City Vision

by John Donnelly Marketing Edinburgh

Collaboration has long been at the heart of Marketing Edinburgh's mission, bridging the public and private sectors to align on common goals and showcase our incredible city to the world. There is, however, a critical third party that the organisation must always be accountable to when driving positive change in the Capital – the people who live here, our residents.

In early September this year, Marketing Edinburgh had the privilege of launching the 2050 Edinburgh City Vision residents campaign, inviting all those who live in Edinburgh to share what matters most to them for the future. A chance to positively influence what the city will be like in the year 2050.

The programme dates back to Autumn 2016, when the City of Edinburgh Council invited festivals, universities, media, schools and the city's public and private sectors to talk about their aspirations, plans and hopes. Four themes identified as being important to Edinburgh came through: connected, inspiring, thriving and fair. Themes that make me incredibly encouraged by what's to come.

Now the next stage is here, and with these four themes in mind, the conversation has been widened, giving every person who lives in the city the chance to have their voice heard.

The integrated campaign is far reaching and includes multiple touchpoints including striking advertising posing the question 'My Edinburgh will...?' and interactive billboards, and a 'taxi

to the future' offering free cab rides in exchange for views. As diverse a range of views as possible is being sought so, alongside general awareness raising, schools, universities, sporting and community groups have been actively engaged.

All activity points back to www.edinburgh2050.com, where residents are encouraged to share what their future Edinburgh will ideally be like. It is, after all, their city.

The final City Vision will act as a blueprint for the future, something that every person, business and organisation in Edinburgh can take inspiration from when planning for the years ahead. One that they have all helped shape.

My own vision is that our city will be a world class city for everyone.

Edinburgh is already an incredible, world leading destination. It has beautiful, historic architecture on its doorstep, is home to the best festivals in the world and has long been a centre for invention and knowledge. It is one of the world's most educated cities, and enjoys thriving technology, life sciences, financial, culture and arts sectors driving a high-quality jobs market. Add an exciting choice of shops, restaurants and attractions in to the mix, and it's little wonder the city regularly top 'best place to live and work' studies.

It's all there to be enjoyed...but not everyone who lives here gets to. The fact that almost a quarter of Edinburgh's children and 22% of the city's households live below the poverty line cannot be escaped. In my mind, our city's future successes mean nothing if everyone, particularly the next generation, can't fully embrace and experience them.

The city's renowned education system must evolve to better support children and young adults living in poverty, eliminating exclusion and ensuring all students are leaving school, college or university with skills to equip them for

employment.

Edinburgh has to continue to seek global investment in its flourishing job market and work with employers to ensure equal opportunities across a wide range of jobs, including entry level positions, with clear paths for progression.

One in five households across Scotland are pushed into poverty after paying housing costs, and a lack of affordable housing means the country's poorest people are spending the highest proportion of their income on housing. This is particularly true of Edinburgh, where house prices are amongst the most expensive in Scotland, and on the rise. More affordable housing won't just make it easier for people to get that first step on to the housing ladder, it will help reduce inequality as a whole.

Finally, recent research found that an incredible amount of benefits are being left unclaimed by families who need them most, attributed to reasons including embarrassment and language barriers. With a more understanding, accepting society we can help address this.

The City of Edinburgh Council has already made good headway with initiatives like the '1 in 5 project' which tackles child poverty in schools. However, as a collective we can and must do more to support each other – in business, in communities and in all areas of our day to day lives.

We need to be ambitious and unwavering in our steps to future proof Edinburgh's status as an outstanding place to live, work, visit, study and invest – and make it accessible to all.

That's my vision, but there are many more ways to make a change. I urge everyone to seize this unique opportunity and have your voice heard on the Edinburgh 2050 City Vision at <http://www.edinburgh2050.com>