

21,000 children in Edinburgh now living in poverty

Teaching staff have been forced to set up an “in-school food bank” to support some of the 21,000 children now living in poverty in Edinburgh – as 39 per cent of young people in one area of the city face hardship.

Edinburgh is regarded as a well-off city – with incomes 27 per cent higher than the Scotland average. Unemployment rates are lower than those of “any other major UK city” and wages are higher than most other parts of the UK.

But new statistics reveal that 23 per cent of children in Edinburgh live in relative poverty after housing costs, which are high in the capital. The relative poverty line is set at 60 per cent of UK median household income after housing costs, adjusted for family size.

In the Gorgie and Sighthill ward of the city, the child poverty level is as high as 39 per cent, Leith and Forth wards both register 34 per cent. More than 30 per cent of children living in Portobello/Craigmillar, Leith Walk, the city centre and Gilmerton/Liberton wards are living in poverty. At the other end of the scale, 11 per cent of youngsters in Corstophine, Murrayfield and Inverleith live in poverty.

The council’s vice-convenor of education, children and families, Cllr Alison Dickie, has written to chief executive Andrew Kerr, demanding that child poverty be made central to the council’s agenda. The move comes after a primary school teacher gave a heart-breaking account of child poverty faced

by front-line workers.

The reality of child poverty was laid bare by Claire Robertson, who told councillors that in 26 years of teaching, she has “never experienced the level of need facing our schools and families”.

Ms Robertson said that some children “appear dirty and clothes are often unwashed” while nursery pupils attend wearing nappies and some pupils need a “quiet area to sleep during the school day”.

The testimony also revealed that after her school closed due to bad weather, “on returning to school we were shocked to see the children at breakfast club eating breakfast with two spoons out of two bowls as they had had no food since they had left the school”.

She added: “Although there is a local food bank, which is only open once a week, the school staff contribute to an in-school food bank – which can be accessed by parents.”

The city council has launched a host of projects in schools and with partner organisations in an attempt to reduce child poverty levels -including holiday hunger project, Discover – with the authority putting £250,000 into the scheme.

But union officials have blasted the lack of funding and accused education officials of under-estimating the extent of child poverty in Edinburgh.

Des Loughney from Edinburgh TUC told councillors that “food banks are being overwhelmed by rising demand” and that “it’s shocking children are going hungry”.

He added: that the poverty figures are “possibly a couple of years out of date” and “high housing costs in Edinburgh are not taken into account”.

Cllr Dickie, who heads up the recently formed multi-agency

child poverty action unit, has called for all parts of the council to grasp the problem, with a plea that “the education department can not do it alone, schools can not do it alone”. She said: “Child poverty is one of the most absolute important topics. It’s not high enough on the agenda of this council and across the city – I think there’s a complete lack of understanding about what exists.

“Every single one of us should be weeping about the child poverty that exists and its impact.”

The council’s young people’s champion, SNP Cllr Ellie Bird added: “Child poverty is probably the most pressing thing that’s facing this council – we need to all take massive licence of that.”

Claire Robertson addressed the city council’s Education, Children and Families Committee, sharing her often distressing experiences as the first port of call for struggling families.

She said: “Some of the children appear dirty and clothes are often unwashed or inappropriate for the season.

“Some children find coping in class very challenging and experience episodes of tiredness – with some children requiring a quiet area to sleep during the school day, crying and lashing out at others when they can’t cope.

“Five families were evicted in the last school session from our school – it’s affected 16 children. Four families had to move out of the catchment area, requiring a change of school. One family had disability payments and support temporarily stopped as they were placed outside the city.”

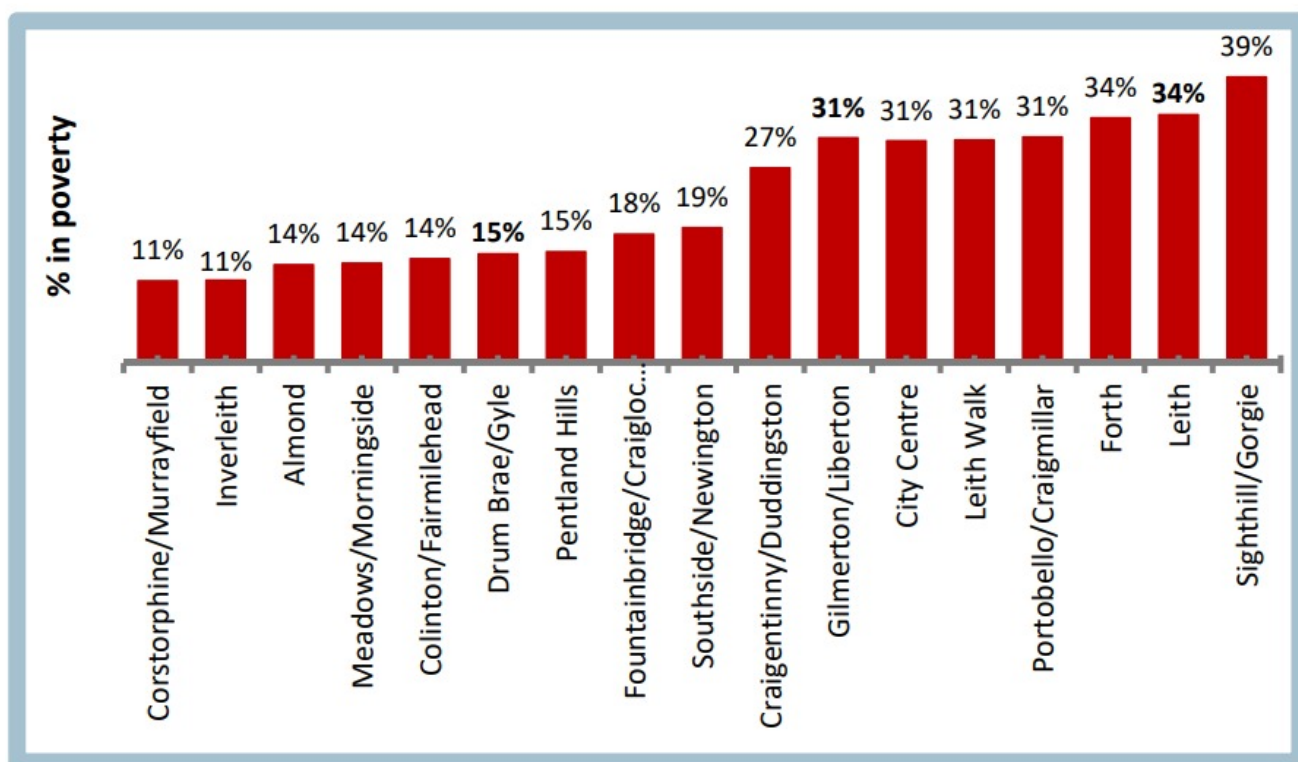
She added: “Two years ago, when we had to close the school due to adverse weather conditions, on returning to school we were shocked to see the children at breakfast club eating breakfast with two spoons out of two bowls as they had had no food since they had left the school.

“We witness children’s physical development being delayed,

nursery children attending using nappies, without the vocabulary expected at that stage and not being able to grow at the expected rate.

“Although there is a local food bank, which is only open once a week, the school staff contribute to an in-school food bank – which can be accessed by parents.”

[Click here](#) to watch the webcast of the council’s Education Committee meeting.



Edinburgh Child Poverty Statistics by council Ward.

One city councillor who represents Sighthill/Gorgie – the ward with the highest child poverty statistic in the city – tweeted this on Friday :

It's upsetting to see the child poverty levels in [#Edinburgh](#) & upsetting that [#SighthillGorgie](#) ward has the highest level at 39%, this is completely unacceptable in this day & age. I will be engaging with the officers first thing on Monday – much more needs to be done, much more. pic.twitter.com/EjI5PplzWr

– Cllr Ashley Graczyk (@ashleyannotate) [August 17, 2019](#)

