

Councillor calls for leadership on the fight against child poverty in Edinburgh

by Councillor Scott Arthur Labour councillor for Colinton/Fairmilehead.

There can be no doubt that child poverty in the UK is rising. Under the Brown/Blair Government it fell dramatically as a result of very significant additional spending on benefits and tax credits.

Since then, however, things have gone backwards. The number of children living in poverty is set to hit 37% this year – that is more than 1 in 3 children. This exceeds the previous high of 34% recorded in the '90s, and should shame us all.

The causes of child poverty are complex and the impact long lasting, but right now the combined impact of wage stagnation, high rents, unemployment and welfare reform are combining to create the perfect storm in Edinburgh.

Many people in Edinburgh supported the Poverty Alliance's calls for the Nationalist Government to increase Child Benefit payments, and ultimately forced this to act one year earlier (2021) than planned for those under six. However, that is almost two years away and children over 6 will have to wait a further year – this is apparently “bold and ambitious”!

Whilst kids in poor households wait for this benefit to reach

their mum's purse, poverty will manifest itself in many ways. Recently the Edinburgh Trade Union Council (ETUC) wrote to a cross-party group of councillors raising concerns about "[holiday hunger](#)" in our capital.

The Council is trying to address the issue via income maximisation (making sure families claim what they are entitled to) and via the excellent "[Discover!](#)" programme. This complements the diverse range of work being undertaken across the city by charities, community groups and, no doubt, grandparents. It is estimated that Discover! will reach less than 10% of those eligible for free school meals – and it operates only 3 days a week from just 4 hubs in our capital.

Once the summer recess is over, I hope to again bring a motion to Council which will ask that we learn from [Dumfries and Galloway Council](#), [North Lancashire's "Club 365"](#), [North Ayrshire's "Wrap, Run and Fun"](#) and ["Fife's "Cafe inc"](#).

Edinburgh should be leading on fighting child poverty, not following others.

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