

Council still has work to do to end poverty

The council set a goal of ending poverty in the city by 2030, but the council leader said that while progress has been made, reaching the target remains a challenge.

The Poverty Commission reported its [findings](#) two years ago, and Cllr Cammy Day, the council leader, was the Co-Chair and this is a cause close to his heart.

One of the most worrying facts revealed in the Poverty Commission [report](#) was that there was estimated to be around £80 million of unclaimed benefits in Edinburgh during the time the commission conducted its work among Edinburgh residents.

The council through its work with the voluntary sector has since helped families to find around £20 million extra in terms of DWP benefits. In addition the council has in 2022 invested a total of £8 million in providing direct payments to 31,900 families on low incomes. This includes two payments of £100 for each child who gets free school meals. The extra funding has increased the money available for crisis grant payments and has cleared school meal related debts.

Using the council programme called Maximise! the council combines “welfare and debt advice, advice on managing living costs, housing support, holistic family support, employability, and healthy living advice”. The council leader said he is also speaking to housing associations and business to see what they can do to combine resources and offer real

help.

In addition to families who are entitled to benefits, there are pensioners with around £11 million in unclaimed pension credits.

Council officers know that there is an increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty, and say it has been apparent for the last year.

Cllr Day said: "There is a huge number of things the city is doing, but outwith what we are able to achieve there are soaring interest rates, and a government that is not sure what to do day by day. Interest rates alone could put another 3,000 people with mortgages into poverty."

The End Poverty Action Group set up after the Poverty Commission reported two years ago is made up of people who have personal experience of poverty. Cllr Day said it is a very positive thing that this group tells the council what is going wrong and where, "rather than a bunch of politicians or academics doing it".

The Council Leader is determined to continue the work to help the needy living in Edinburgh. He said: "When we set the target it was ambitious but we are not going to shift it. It will be difficult, but we will keep championing the need to eradicate poverty by 2030."

What do we mean when we say, 'End Poverty'?

"Ending poverty does not mean Edinburgh becoming a city in which no one ever loses a job or experiences a period of their life on low income.

But it does mean Edinburgh being a city where living on a low income is temporary, not a persistent trap, and does mean not having to go without food, or warmth, or safety.

And it means Edinburgh becoming a city where the number of people experiencing low income at any given time falls to a level comparable with the highest performing societies in Europe."

Edinburgh Poverty Commission

A report produced to highlight the council's response to the Poverty Commission thus far explains some of the areas in which the council has worked with some degree of success, and sets out some 61 calls to action.

One of the ways that the council has begun to address people experiencing poverty is to have introduced a citywide system of advice on welfare and benefits which is prominent on the home page of the council website.

A new scheme to prevent homelessness has prevented around 240 families from becoming homeless in the first place.

A pot of £65 million is being spent on retrofitting council homes with energy saving measures so that they become cheaper for residents to run.

The council also works to try and reduce the city's unemployment rate and encourages every business here to pay the Living Wage – particularly any that it contracts with. (This has been a very successful year with 160 new businesses

newly accredited as Living Wage Employers.)

But the council requires two things of the UK Government when the new Fiscal Statement is made on Thursday: it needs more UK Government support paid to The Scottish Government so that the council in turn receives more funding, and there is also a need for the Chancellor to raise UK benefits in line with inflation.

HOUSING SHORTAGE

Officers warn that the council housing shortage can only be addressed with extra funding from The Scottish Government. And council officers also warn that they estimate soaring interest rates will put around 3,000 mortgage holders in danger of sinking into poverty.

Council Leader Cammy Day said: “These new reports show that we’re making good progress against our targets in becoming a net-zero city and ending poverty by 2030. Edinburgh continues to be recognised as a city at the forefront of both these agendas, and we’re working hard to make sure that we continue to deliver on our plans to positively impact on the people off Edinburgh’s daily lives.

“We’ve done a huge amount to support people during the cost of living crisis, including helping families to gain £20 million in unclaimed benefits and reduced debt, and putting an extra £8m of Council funds directly into the pockets of those most in need of help. We’ve also been improving access to fair work, preventing homelessness and delivering housing improvements.

“At the same time, we know that hitting our targets will get more and more challenging every year – particularly in the current economic context – and we’ll need UK and Scottish Governments in particular to step up and continue to support us.

“We’ve got ambitious goals, but they’re grounded in the important task of getting the basics right for the people of Edinburgh. Our refreshed Business Plan stays true to our core ambitions of ending poverty and becoming a net-zero city by 2030, but we’re also shifting more of our focus to working with everyone to deliver on our shared priorities. We need to keep our essential public services running at the standard people expect, deliver support for those who need it most and protect the environment that sustains us all.

“We’ve listened to our residents and recognise that Edinburgh needs a council that can adapt quickly and securely while continuing to deliver the services our people need within the resources we have available – taking into account the need for sustainable funding from government – and I’ll continue to make the case that our capital city needs fair funding to do this.”

Councillors will discuss the report on Thursday at the [Policy & Sustainability Committee](#) meeting.