
A FAIRER SCOTLAND?

*Informing the Scottish Government on the real impact of poverty
through lived experience*

A participatory report from:
Dundee Fairness Commission
Edinburgh Poverty Commission
Fair for All Commission
Poverty Truth Community
Voices for Equity

Background

The *Poverty Truth Community* (formerly *Poverty Truth Commission*) was established in 2009, bringing together people living with poverty and others in positions of influence in Scotland to work as equal partners. Following discussions between the *Poverty Truth Commission* (PTC) and the Scottish Government three new ‘poverty truth style’ conversations were established in Dundee, Shetland and North Ayrshire and part-funded by the Scottish Government - taking the values and learning from the PTC, and developing the idea for local settings. A fourth was later established in Edinburgh. For the purposes of this report these groups will be referred to as the *poverty working groups*.

In June 2019 the PTC was approached by the Scottish Government to conduct research into the work that each of the poverty working groups were undertaking and the impact this has had to inform a new set of actions towards a fairer Scotland. This report is the first opportunity to do this and sets out the findings and learnings across each of the areas in Scotland. The process that was undertaken is provided as an appendix to this report.

The poverty working groups welcome the opportunity to work with the Scottish Government on the commendable aim of reducing poverty levels in Scotland to amongst the lowest in Europe by 2030. *A Fairer Scotland?* is a participatory report from the people who know the complexities and the destructive nature of poverty better than anyone, and whilst sometimes critical of current systems and structures, the views expressed are made with an experience of poverty and what this means. The views also come from a place of hope and desire for a better and fairer Scotland. There is hope too that through the Scottish Government’s aim to take a more focused and targeted approach to engaging with people with lived experience of poverty across Scotland, that together a real and lasting change can be made.

A National Context

“Through the despair and frustration lies a glimmer of hope that we will be listened to and that a specific course of action will be taken” – Poverty Working Group Member

The local activities and engagement by the poverty working groups have been analysed and grouped into ‘national themes’ which were then further developed in a two-day participatory conversation. These 6 themes form the basis of this report and from the outset it is important to note the cause and effect nature each theme has on each other.

- **The links between poverty and mental health**
- **The continuation of food insecurity**
- **Financial insecurity keeping people in poverty**
- **In-work poverty and the challenges of working**
- **A need to improve services**
- **The impact of poverty on community and society**

Whilst the situation may differ in each locality there are similarities to be drawn across the country – for example feelings of isolation in Shetland can be echoed through being stuck in the asylum

system in Glasgow, whilst feelings of being judged and the stigma attached for using foodbanks are also reinforced in the assessment process of services.

The long-lasting nature of poverty is complex with each strand interlinked. Despite the interconnectedness of the poverty themes no joined up approach by services is evident, causing frustration and anxiety amongst individuals. This report takes each theme individually and applies the thoughts, concerns and ideas around them. However, it is important to also keep in mind how they all affect or are affected by each other if we are to succeed in having a fairer Scotland and 2030 can see a *“fair, smart, inclusive Scotland, where everyone can feel at home, where fair work helps businesses to thrive and create jobs, where poverty rates are amongst the lowest in Europe, and where there is genuinely equal opportunity for all”*.¹

Tackling Stigma

Running through each of the 6 themes, the debilitating everyday reality of stigma was mentioned. Tackling stigma is one of the core elements that the Scottish Government seek to address but this itself is complex and interconnected. It is not as simple as just tackling the stigma or changing the narrative around poverty in isolation. People are often living with more than one stigma that is linked to poverty. Mental ill-health, the use of food banks, an inability to afford social activities for children and the use of benefits are all mentioned as having stigma attached. With that in mind, coming up against ‘institutionalised stigma’ and a negative set of assumptions, beliefs or attitudes within public services exacerbates the problem further.

A Passion for Change

‘Poverty’ as a word is becoming normalised and all the while there is a feeling that things that were once unacceptable have become acceptable, underpinned by a failure to act - street homelessness, food poverty and the rise in food banks as cases in point. It is not simply enough to support people to speak out and challenge injustice if nothing is perceived to change.

People are tired of campaigning and telling their story - they often talk of anger, frustration and despair but there remains hope that, despite the long-lasting nature of poverty, things might change. A passion for change has built up over the course of spending time together as a network of poverty working groups. We look forward to working with you on addressing these themes and making a reality this grassroots driven sense of hope.

The links between poverty and mental health

There have been significant rises in mental health issues across each of the areas where the poverty working groups are located. Whilst we cannot assume that this is all linked with poverty, it has become increasingly apparent that poverty is very isolating and stressful and the way that stress is dealt with affects people’s mental health and ability to cope with life.

The poverty working groups continue to hear that mental health and poverty are linked in at least two significant ways.

- Firstly, how being in poverty affects mental health – the stigma it attracts and the lack of understanding of its complexity; the stress and anxiety associated with Universal Credit,

¹ *Fairer Scotland Action Plan*, Ministerial Foreword 2016

debt and food insecurity; and the feeling of judgement rather than support from public services.

- Secondly, how poor mental health is as a factor trapping people in low income and poverty – the ability to work and sustain employment set against factors such as lack of understanding and flexibility of employers.

Young People

Evidence shows that young people in our most deprived areas are more likely to experience mental health problems than those in the least deprived², whilst mental health in childhood has been linked to poorer outcomes in later life such as leaving school with no qualifications and the ability to work and earn as adults³. This vicious cycle must be addressed.

The *Edinburgh Poverty Commission* speaks out about some schools in Edinburgh having good support for mental health whilst others can only refer young people to a service in the local community, often with long waiting lists. This lack of consistency in availability of services is both frustrating and potentially disastrous for young people – creating a route into rather than out of poverty. Within the poverty working groups there exists a perceived failure in the strengthening of frontline resources after a drive to encourage people to talk about their mental health with the outcome being people at a crisis point cannot access the services within a suitable timeframe.

Passed from Pillar to Post

Barriers are in place that exacerbate the link between poverty and poor mental health. There is criticism of being passed from pillar to post within services without ever receiving an appropriate response or answer – in turn adding to the individuals stress and insecurity.

Not only does this go against the ‘person centred approach’ promoted by the Scottish Government, but in a recent meeting the poverty working groups held with Aileen Campbell MSP, she stated, *“There should be no wrong answers through any door”*. These failures in the system and within services are detrimental to people’s progress in tackling mental health and poverty issues whilst being a huge waste of resources in a country that already spends upwards of £10.7 billion⁴ on the social and economic consequences of poor mental health.

There needs to be a greater understanding of the trauma that comes with poverty. People have spoken out about having to relive their trauma repeatedly due to bureaucratic processes. Some inter-connectedness or inter-service communication would, or should, make this unnecessary whilst also speeding up processes.

Medical Assessments

The intrusive nature and lack of understanding of the medical assessment process within the DWP throws up hurdles to overcome. The poverty working groups have picked up on concerns around a lack of understanding and, more importantly, qualifications of people making assessments along with them not being legally obliged to adhere to what the medical professionals have to say. The poverty working groups are not simply there to criticise the existing situation but to also offer suggestions about what needs to change. In the context of the DWP, they are very clear that within the questions they are asked, assessors need to have some real knowledge of what they are

² *We Can Solve Poverty in the UK*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation p.10. (2016).

³ *Fundamental Facts About Mental Health*, Mental Health Foundation p.35 (2016).

⁴ *What's it worth now? (2009/10)* Scottish Association for Mental Health, 2011

asking plus an insight into the complexity of the situation. Similarly, there must be an acceptance that what health professionals and others say must hold some authority rather than someone in the job centre making decisions. The poverty working groups recognise the different approach of the new social security system in Scotland with an emphasis on dignity and respect and would welcome the opportunity to work alongside you in developing this further.

Change is Essential

To achieve a more relational and understanding service requires adequate money being put in the service to train staff on the benefits system and mental health. The triggers that lead to poor mental health (stress, anxiety, stigma) must be tackled and a more empowering system put in place. Services need to adopt a more approachable and relational model. Stories told from people who feel they are treated inhumanely should be heard and actioned accordingly. At a national level there needs to be an improvement on early intervention to reduce the risks that poverty brings, in particular that of mental ill-health.

“Giving you more support for mental health doesn’t increase food on the table, you’re still poor, you don’t get more money because you’re attending these services. So that in itself can also increase anger and frustration.” – Poverty Working Group Member

Change is essential if Scotland as a whole is to take seriously the links between poverty and mental health. The poverty working groups describe increasing numbers of community responses in terms of projects (both paid and voluntary) now exist to undertake the role that other services should be doing, whilst continuing to have to fight for funding – making access to universal credit easier; providing easily accessible work clubs that are supportive and non-judgemental; mental health support; access to healthy and affordable food; and providing after school care as examples. All responses that can have a positive impact on mental health.

What communities are reporting is that the support that makes a difference tends to be both practical and emotional and as important as these two things are, they tend to be separate. The practical help can be more easily accessible, but you might be on a long waiting list for mental health services. Even a slight change to the system could help overcome the gap of accessing emotional and practical support.

Poverty working groups’ calls for action:

- *More community dialogue around poverty and its links with mental health.*
 - *A more relational and understanding model needs to be adopted within services, with effective evaluation and appropriate training of staff.*
 - *A joined up and inter-connected approach to services is required.*
 - *Greater consistency in the availability of resources to tackle poor mental health.*
 - *Increased support for local projects working to tackle mental health issues and poverty and a drive to reduce waiting times for professional support.*
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The continuation of food insecurity

“Foodbanks shouldn’t be normalised. They shouldn’t be something that we have to get used to. We should be fighting to get rid of them”. – Poverty Working Group Member

The inclusion of the word “*continuation*” within this theme is a crucial aspect and whilst a theme of “*food insecurity*” should be enough to demand action on its own, the focus is also on how this has been allowed to continue for so long in a country as rich as Scotland. The lack of action over the years in dealing with the rise in food poverty and the increased reliance on foodbanks coupled with a relentless push for change that goes unheard has caused much despair, anger and deep frustration within our communities.

Justice, not charity

The persistence of food poverty and the lack of movement around changing this has led to a feeling that things that were once viewed as unacceptable are now seen as acceptable – food poverty and the rise in foodbank use. The normalising of foodbanks within schools and communities and the development of a range of books showing foodbank use in a bid to destigmatise use is indicative of where we are at as a society on the issue – often well-intentioned but a wrong approach avoiding addressing the core issues.

Foodbanks were never meant to be a permanent solution nor an established part of the system. They were intended as a short-term solution, as help at a point of crisis. One of the challenges we are facing is how the continued presence of foodbanks in communities can be challenged and how both the UK and Scottish Governments can eradicate the long-term causes of food poverty. This is an issue the poverty working groups see as a matter of justice, not charity.

Living with Food Poverty

The poverty working groups report accounts from people about the varying degrees of food insecurity that exist - from worrying about being able to afford enough food for themselves and their families; to going without food and experiencing hunger. Some of the associated factors people share around food poverty are rising costs of living, the high costs, and access to, fresh fruit and vegetables and benefits not keeping pace with rising cost of essentials. Food poverty is intrinsically linked with other factors such as mental and physical health, low pay and in-work poverty along with issues around stigma and a lack of understanding.

Schools

Food insecurity is a massive problem affecting individuals and families across the country. Daily in North Ayrshire, for example, 1 in 3 young people go to school hungry - the Scottish average is 1 in 5. There is disgust and anger that children are going without food during school holidays and the lack of breakfast clubs (or oversubscribed) and after school care clubs plus the increase in cost of these. Even the best schemes are only picking up a tiny proportion of those living in poverty. Although schools provide many opportunities, they do not solve the problem long-term in the way that lifting the standard of living and increasing money available would. This could provide more money to spend and would give the dignity of being able to buy and pay for own food.

Dignity

Going to foodbanks is very soul destroying and takes a lot of courage to go and ask for help. There is often no dignity in the way foodbanks are set up and more thought is needed in the

practicalities such as where they are located, having to carry heavy bags the choice of food available, how to cook it and cultural sensitivities. Among the poverty working groups there is an appreciation of foodbanks but people prefer paying a minimal sum and selecting rather than being given food purely because it is cheap. The referral system often used causes stress and anxiety and compounds the feeling of being stigmatised.

It is vital that people who use foodbanks and are experts on the impact of doing so are listened to. Only then can its true impact be understood - the impact of feeling stigmatised and judged; the reliance on a referral system that means someone else taking the decision if you are hungry or not; or the choice between eating or paying for social activities for your children.

Poverty working groups' calls for action:

- *A stronger course of action is required to replace foodbanks with a more dignified model with a bid to eradicate food poverty/insecurity altogether.*
 - *A move away from emergency food aid as a solution towards preventative and rights-based measures, increasing incomes of people.*
 - *Greater access to breakfast clubs and after school care across the country.*
 - *Lifting the standard of living and money available to spend on food for families.*
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Financial insecurity keeping people in poverty & In-work poverty and the challenges of working

“And the prize is a precious one - by 2030 a fair, smart, inclusive Scotland, where everyone can feel at home, where fair work helps businesses to thrive and create jobs, where poverty rates are amongst the lowest in Europe, and where there is genuinely equal opportunity for all.” – Fairer Scotland Action Plan

The themes of financial insecurity keeping people in poverty and in-work poverty and the challenges of working share a lot of similarities, with people on low income struggling just as much as people on benefits. Financial insecurity may initially appear an obvious theme but when broken down the impact felt covers a multitude of challenges that people are concerned about – lack of money; accessing benefits and the challenges this provides; debt and accessing affordable credit; rising costs of living with static pay; and insecure work with an increasing reliance on zero-hours contracts.

People report experiencing a feeling that everything is stacked against them financially when living in poverty. The systems in place wherever you look are not supportive. They do not work when it is easier to go and borrow money from doorstep lenders than the bank; when minimum wage has been set as the standard rather than a safety net for which it was intended; when working leaves you worse off than being on benefits; and when child care becomes so prohibitive due to cost and inaccessible due to working hours.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit continues to cause frustration and stress with sanctions, the processes by which it is run and how people are treated being strongly criticised. The lack of understanding by other services around how Universal Credit operates is also concerning. Helping to empower people rather than creating barriers can help to reduce poverty. The current pause from Westminster of Universal Credit offers an opportunity for the Scottish Government to exert influence around change – in particular, training for staff in other agencies.

The Asylum Process

Financial insecurity is also a huge concern for people within our asylum process including those with leave to remain status. Having no recourse to public funds but with a need to renew a visa every 30 months is at best an unhelpful system and at worst destructive for those within it. There is a feeling of lack of security despite being granted leave to stay. The stress and anxiety caused through the process of asylum does not go away with remain to leave. If anything, it is further compounded by the costs of visa and low pay.

Fuel Costs

Even fuel costs and the disparity across the country forces people to remain in poverty. As an example, the poverty working groups hear about the cost of fuel in Shetland being a factor in trapping people in poverty. Rises in prices have been consistent, often attributed to limited choice of suppliers whereas wages have been static. People report on having to get a second job just to pay for fuel bills, but this also has a knock on effect on childcare costs, trapping people in a vicious cycle of trying to get out of poverty against a system that does not work for people. Although there is a recognition on Shetland that there is an extra cost in fuel and transport living on the island: those who work in local government (e.g. Council, Police, NHS and Fire) receive a Distant Island Allowance (DIA). However, there is a feeling that this taxable payment still does not have the impact of preventing financial insecurity.

Childcare

Working to survive in a system that is not supportive – a system that often makes it better to not work and having a government telling you that you should be working but then not providing you with the support to do so is counter-productive. Parents are struggling as there are not enough breakfast clubs and after school clubs and they cannot afford private childcare and therefore have to send their children to council run services which have seen a huge increase in price. There is a strong feeling of being let down by local councils who instigated the price hike seemingly without consideration of those who would be hit the hardest.

In Work Poverty

People experiencing in-work poverty refer to a feeling of being penalised for working - having to get a second job affects Universal Credit as an example. There are also the rising costs of childcare and travel to school costs, particularly in areas like Shetland. There is a frustration around free childcare places only being reserved for term time rather than all year round, but also recognition of how free childcare for children under three would have a hugely positive impact on families across the country.

People who have children and are better off on benefits rather than working and paying for things like childcare, uniform, school lunches and other necessities, say this leaves them with no choice but to remain on benefits. This can lead to long-lasting poverty and the years that pass make it more difficult to get back into work. There are many examples given of the challenges people in

work are facing with regards to poverty. Debt, insecure work, working rights and conditions, low pay and zero hours contracts are all recurring themes across the groups.

“I worked for years and paid my taxes for years but as soon as you’re not able to do that the attitude towards you completely changes” - Poverty Working Group Member

The three main inter-connected factors that trap people who are working in poverty are low pay, the number of hours worked, and income lost through the welfare and tax systems. Add in any additional expenses such as childcare, transport or fuel costs and this becomes even more prohibitive.

Poverty working groups’ calls for action:

- *Affordable flexible childcare available for all.*
 - *An end to requirement of repeated fees paid by refugees with legal status to the Home Office to maintain their legal status in this country.*
 - *The right to a contract with living hours as set out by the Living Hours Campaign.*
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A need to improve services

The provision of, and access to, services is a fundamental theme running across all aspects of poverty. Job centres, DWP assessment processes, Universal Credit, housing associations and, in particular instances, foodbanks, have all received widespread criticism of how they are run and the problems this causes. There is also a concern that frontline services such as mental health service providers are stretched to capacity – meaning that accessing them at a crisis point in people’s lives is virtually impossible. A lack of consistency in service provision across communities raises questions of a fair and equal society.

“There is a problem with the culture of organisations – you can get good individuals, but the culture and training they receive is destructive” - Poverty Working Group Member

A Person-Centred Approach

People talk about the existence of a power imbalance in favour of the service provider, particularly in terms of targets that need to be met. Even the presence of physical barriers in services creates an ‘us’ and ‘them’ situation – walls, sitting higher up and the feelings this imposes. There is very little relational support which involved staff addressing the situation through a person-centred approach. The services are viewed as very ‘procedural’ without the time for the human element, whereas the most valuable help is in the relational and conversational aspect. Staff see people at a moment in time and do not see what has happened beforehand to get to this situation. Participants report a feeling of being labelled by staff (unconsciously, or not) as ‘jobless’, ‘single mum’ or ‘asylum seeker’.

Institutionalised Stigma

Institutionalised stigma has grown into a genuine concern for people who are already facing more than one stigma at a time – poverty, mental health, food poverty as examples. Engaging with services and encountering negative attitudes and stigma is detrimental and destructive as people speak out about not wanting to be in that situation and seeking a way out. However, the poverty working groups continue to hear locally that people’s expectations and experiences of many services is that they are seen to be trying to get what they can from the system. If all the interactions with services, General Practitioners, housing, Job Centres, schools were ‘more human’ or simply understanding or caring that would make a significant difference to the person in crisis.

A joined-Up System

The lack of understanding and lack of joined up approach to services is not only counter-productive, but also creates additional problems for people. Different parts of the system are seen to be working against other parts.

The poverty working groups also observe people being ‘passed from pillar to post’ and not ever receiving the answers they are looking for or need - the implication often being that people are trying to get something to which you are not entitled. This causes frustration and anxiety. The impact of having to re-tell your story repeatedly and being forced through bureaucratic processes to relive trauma is a destructive process. Some form of inter-service communication would, or should, make this unnecessary and have the potential to speed up internal processes.

A Relational Approach

As a country we face the challenge, amidst spending cuts, of how a more relational approach to services can be put in place?

There is widespread evidence through community responses to tackling poverty that this relational approach makes a real and sustained difference. Whilst there is admiration for this work, there is a frustration that many voluntary and paid community projects now exist to do the work other public services should be doing – making access to Universal Credit easier; providing work clubs that are supportive and non-judgemental; strengthening resilience in young people; providing affordable food and foodbanks; and providing breakfast clubs and after school care as examples. Learning from these grassroots community projects is essential for public services.

There needs to be a shift away from the tick box culture in organisations to one of relational support. Much has been made of what is not working within services but ultimately how will we know if the right change has been made to services?

The suggestions are fairly simple – service users welcomed into an environment whereby there is no pre-judgement, the provider is there to assist with what is required at this moment in time; there is no requirement to retell your story constantly, whilst rather than referrals it is more an ‘introductions’ model where people see you as a person, not as a condition.

Poverty working groups' calls for action:

- *A system of inter-service communication whereby people do not have to relive personal (often traumatic) situations each time they see someone.*
 - *A shift in culture and improved training within services – changing the culture to a more personal and relational approach.*
 - *Address the imbalance of power within services ensuring mutual understanding and a fairer system.*
 - *Tackle institutionalised stigma and changing the narrative around poverty present within our public services.*
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The impact of poverty on community and society

Despite each of the poverty working groups being located in different areas of Scotland, there are striking similarities around the impact poverty has on community and society; and also the resulting feelings that this has – for example in Dundee there are feelings of being dictated to and not consulted at grassroots levels, where people in poverty are the experts. The result being no joined up approach and projects engaging in the same activities. Without active community engagement, programmes like community development and community asset transfers appear to be about getting rid of resources local that national government do not want to spend money on. Empowering communities is essential but can only be done if people at grassroots level are being consulted on issues that directly impact them.

The poverty working groups are hearing locally that poverty is linked heavily with issues like drug use and an increase in drug deaths; addictions; shops shutting and businesses closing; poor transport links; a shortage in affordable housing; a visible rise in homelessness; an increase in anti-social behaviour; and a return to violence, division and sectarianism. There is a degree of understanding that there is a strain on public services to tackle these issues, but the question is raised of what is the real cost and the impact of not tackling them through appropriate services?

Different Stages of Life

Poverty is affecting people in our communities at different stages of their lives and in different ways. Yet all of it comes down to one thing and that is a lack of money. Young people are talking about the effects of social exclusion and not being able to engage with their peers, with the stigma that is then attached to this. Parents are concerned about feeding their families, the cost of the school day and the prohibitive costs and inflexible nature of childcare. The working age population in employment are experiencing poverty through low pay and insecure work where the minimum wage is no longer a safety net but has become the standard. Older people are concerned about pensions and not having paid into them over the years due to low pay, but also about having adult children at home who cannot afford to leave home.

A one size fits all approach to tackling poverty does not work when the complexity of the situation is fully considered. What is clear however is that mental health is a factor of concern for all ages and demographics that is being compounded by the stresses that poverty brings. Poverty does not just affect individuals: communities across Scotland are also losing out due to poverty. It is

depriving our communities of the gifts, skills and talents of people who have a valuable contribution to make.

Exclusion

The poverty working groups identify a worrying trend in our communities whereby low pay and no money means people are excluded from using local facilities like sports centres, local shops and businesses which in turn means local amenities are closing. This feeling of being excluded in a local context exacerbates feelings of not belonging whilst the disparity in communities where people have to rely on foodbanks and the gulf between rich and poor continues. The *Edinburgh Poverty Commission* refer to large numbers of people in Edinburgh who feel no connection to the city at all. A lack of money is keeping people trapped in communities, particularly on islands, which impacts relationships with family and has a huge impact on people's mental health.

Tackling stigma is a vital aspect of addressing the impact poverty is having in our communities – whether that stigma is in the media or institutionalised. There is a passionate drive to change the narrative around poverty to have a more positive impact on communities. There needs to be evidence of politicians taking responsibility for community and society instead of claims in elections and by-elections, but also that they care about tackling the stigma of poverty in these areas in its many different forms – foodbanks, social isolation, mental health, low pay and social security.

Poverty working groups' calls for action:

- *Better communication within communities about decision making and continued support and encouragement of local people to get involved in decision making.*
 - *Community spaces to be maintained and increased in our most deprived communities.*
 - *Rethinking our transport provision could open up greater employment opportunities if costs and availability are addressed. Also, a more improved travel subsidy scheme to help people leave islands.*
 - *More affordable housing for all rather than a focus on student accommodation with greater thought being given to community planning.*
 - *Free sports and breakfast clubs for children in our communities.*
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What next?

The poverty working groups welcome the opportunity to work with the Scottish Government towards the *Fairer Scotland* goal of reducing poverty levels in Scotland to amongst the lowest in Europe by 2030 and are strong in their commitment to continue as a model pushing for change and ensuring there is appropriate responsibility taken in the process of tackling poverty and addressing stigma. Programmes for reducing and eradicating poverty must address the long-lasting nature of poverty and provide support for groups tasked with the role of addressing and understanding poverty at a local level.

A longer-term approach encompassing the learning of the poverty working groups into the decision-making needs to not just be adopted but form the basis of tackling poverty in this country. Rather than reacting to situations, being proactive and changing how we do things is essential. The strength and energy that has emerged working as a network has already shown the value of a joined-up approach in tackling poverty both locally and nationally through a community-led model. People in communities continue to speak out about a sense of despair due to not seeing change happening; yet the ideas generated during an emotional, intense and positive process of dialogue about fairness and social justice have provided a basis for moving forward that can make a real and lasting difference in our communities.

There is great potential in the poverty working groups learning from each other on how we can impact the public's perceptions of poverty and inequality which in turn can support and challenge the Scottish Government. Calls for action around each of the themes have been made and each poverty working group is looking forward to working with the Scottish Government to ensure they are listened to, respected and have a part to play within the *Fairer Scotland* conversation.

Appendix

The Process

The poverty working groups comprise of: Poverty Truth Community (Glasgow); Dundee Fairness Commission; Voices for Equity (Shetland); Fair for All Commission (North Ayrshire); and the Edinburgh Poverty Commission.

Keeping within the nature of how the poverty working groups operate the process used of information gathering was one of meaningful participation ensuring that people with lived experience of poverty are not just heard but actively direct the conversations.

Recognition that each of the poverty working groups are at different points of their community-led work is also applied but June 2019 saw the start of this current process of thematic thinking and learning as the Poverty Truth Community was approached to draw on the key findings of the poverty working groups thus far.

Timeline of events:

Stage 1 (June/July 2019) – each poverty working group was contacted to explain the process and request information on what they have been working on. Questions to consider were provided around: what do you hear people talking about; what do you see happening; what are you working on; what are you aware of that people would like to talk about further?

Stage 2 (August/September 2019) – a draft report of identified themes emerging from the feedback from each of the poverty working groups was produced and disseminated for discussion and any amendments.

Stage 3 (November 2019) – the poverty working groups meet in Edinburgh for two days to discuss the poverty themes in detail and focus on the changes that are needed and the real impact of poverty and of each of the themes discussed.

Stage 4 – (January/February 2020) – Production and dissemination of the *A Fairer Scotland?* report.

The process of meeting as a network of groups fostered a feeling of collaboration and togetherness. There is a hope that things can change and a belief that the raw stories of reality have to not just be heard, but really listened to.