

Tackling homes crisis ‘vital to reduce poverty in Edinburgh’

Call for 20,000 more affordable houses to be built in next decade

- The Scotsman | 30 Sep 2020
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Report called for 20,000 more affordable homes to be built in Edinburgh over the next decade

The “single most important” part of reducing poverty in Edinburgh is tackling the housing crisis, according to a report.

The independent Edinburgh Poverty Commission (EPC) published its report today, which found that almost one in three families in the city living below the poverty line are only in that position due to their housing costs.

This compares with one in eight households who are in poverty across the country as a whole.

More than 77,000 Edinburgh residents live in poverty – about 15 per cent of the population, including one in every five children.

Dr James McCormick, chairman of the EPC, said the housing crisis was a “distinctively Edinburgh challenge because so many families are only dragged below the poverty line by an unaffordable rent”.

He added that a big chunk of the city’s poverty issues could be solved if the housing profile was expanded.

The report called for 20,000 more affordable homes to be built in Edinburgh over the next decade.

Dr McCormick, who is also associate director for Scotland at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said: “If you’re working you should not be poor – it’s as simple as that. The single most important part is solving Edinburgh’s housing crisis.” However, Dr McCormick believes that private landlords also have a part to play, saying: “People are being housed in quite high cost private rented accommodation. “What’s really helpful is when some of those homes are brought into the private leasing pool for the city, so landlords get a three-year deal they get security of income and some degree of predictability about costs.

“The private rented sector has a crucial long-term role to play in the city. What we’re saying is too many families are there long- term when they can’t afford to be.

“They’ re constrained not through choice, and so if people can move over time into lower cost tenancies that goes a very long way to bring down housing costs sustainably.

“The other thing it does importantly is it improves work incentives.

“If you’re facing a very expensive rent and the jobs available to you are minimum wage or just above, then even with universal credit improving tapers it will often not be worth your while taking that job, when you factor in childcare costs.

“So secure tenancies, lower rents are good, not just for housing, but for work.”

Cammy Day, Labour depute leader of Edinburgh City Council, said that it had also been pushing for regulation on short term let, AirBNB-style accommodation.

He said: “It’s an absolute disgrace that on an average day in Edinburgh we’ve got 500 people in temporary accommodation yet hundreds of houses lying empty for probably 75% of the year, only being used for Festival times.”