



OUR MANIFESTO



**Food
Poverty
Action**
Aberdeen



2026



Our Manifesto

Our Vision

“We believe in a Scotland where everyone has what they need to live well. This is a vision which we feel is not only achievable but is also a moral necessity. This manifesto shows how we get there.”



Across Aberdeen and Scotland, people are facing impossible choices: heating or eating, lunch or leisure, childcare or career. We listened to voices from Northfield, Kincorth, Torry and more – people in work, out of work, those with disabilities, parents, carers, elderly, and young people. They told us what life is really like living in poverty.

This manifesto is built from their words. It's not just a list of policies – it's a call for change rooted in lived experience. It's about building a Scotland where no one needs to choose between essentials, support is accessible, wages are fair, and communities are strong.

This is not a full list of every possible anti-poverty policy. Instead, it captures the issues raised most strongly in our discussions and aims to turn those conversations into clear demands. This process has supported people to share their concerns, communicate them to decision-makers, and demand meaningful changes.

Our Demands

- 1** A Scotland where no one falls below a set standard of living.
- 2** A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs.
- 3** A Scotland that shifts the balance of power to communities.

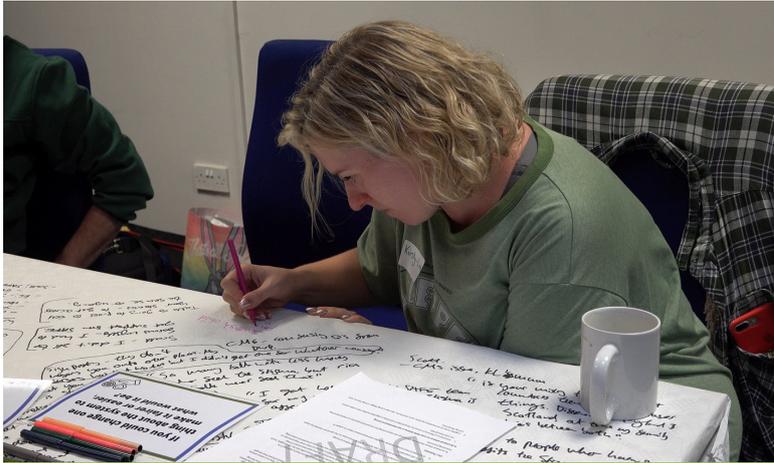
Find our full policy asks on the next page



Who We Are

Lived Experience is at the heart of Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) and it's approach to community development. We believe that the voices of those most affected by challenges, such as the cost-of-living crisis, are integral to finding solutions. In line with this belief CFINE convened a Lived Experience Group, bringing together local residents to discuss a series of topics related to their experiences of poverty and food insecurity. Experiences from participants, along with a public survey, resulted in a report which forms the base of evidence for Our Manifesto.

Our Policies

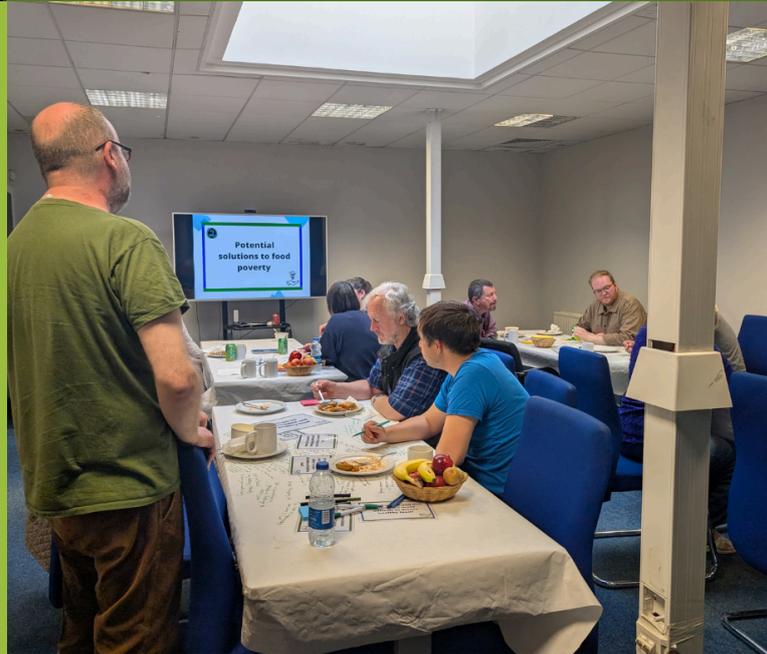


A Scotland where no one falls below a set standard of living

- Introduce a Minimum Income Guarantee to provide a dignified safety net under which no one would fall.
- Legally ensure all workers receive, as a minimum, the real Living Wage, Living Hours, and Living Pensions.

A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs

- Ensure that all rental housing is maintained to a minimum standard and introduce a triple-lock rent cap to ensure affordability.
- Implement a new national social tariff for energy.
- Enhance concessionary schemes and implement affordable fares across public transport.
- Ensure adequate and fair funding for mental health services.
- Invest in public and third sector services which create supportive environments for individuals and communities to access dignified support, volunteer, and develop skills.



A Scotland that shifts the balance of power to communities

- Develop People Panels to promote active citizenship and meaningfully ensure lived experience shapes decisions.
- Develop participatory budgeting to allow for the public to vote on larger pots of funding.



A Scotland where no one falls below a set standard of living

Introduce a Minimum Income Guarantee to provide a dignified safety net under which no one would fall.

“The basic rate of Universal Credit is nowhere near sufficient. Trying to save on gas and electric was a nightmare. I couldn’t afford to do a proper shop. Never. I was buying cheap junk food. I think that contributed to my diabetes. I was also freezing food that was going out of date and reduced... When I got an added element to my UC [due to limited capability to work] what a relief. I was in ALDI, and I thought thank god I don’t have to scrimp and save.”

The Lived Experience Group report highlights the severe impact the cost-of-living crisis continues to have on families and individuals. We found common themes of rising costs of food, fuel, and rents which are outpacing wages and social security payments. Many described struggling to cover the cost of essentials while leisure activities became unaffordable luxuries. Living in these circumstances has devastating effects on mental health and is extremely costly for our public services.

While our evidence comes from Aberdeen, the problem is nationwide. An estimated 1,070,000 people in Scotland (20% of the population) live in relative poverty after housing costs. This represents an increase from 18% recorded between 2009–2012.^[1] In response to enduringly high levels of poverty the idea of a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) has developed.

A MIG is a simple, yet transformative idea. It advocates for the provision of a minimum income, tied to a set standard of living, under which no one can fall. This would be achieved by acting on fair work, costs, services, and social security. If implemented effectively a MIG could lift a million Scots out of relative poverty. The independent report “The Minimum Income Guarantee: a roadmap to dignity for all” produced by the Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group outlines a roadmap outlining the process needed to fully implement the MIG.^[2]

We urge all politicians to listen to the voices of the expert group and those with lived experiences of poverty and include the MIG as a policy commitment in their 2026 election manifesto.

“If I didn’t have savings I would not manage – I haven’t been able to put money aside for emergencies or retirement, let alone luxuries for some time now.”

Survey Evidence

60%

of respondents had missed out on hobbies, social opportunities and fun activities.

49%

of respondents are prioritising one basic need over another (e.g heating over food).

40%

of respondents are relying on friends or family for financial help.

[1] Scottish Government (2025), [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2021–24](#)

[2] Scottish Government (2025), [The Minimum Income Guarantee: a roadmap to dignity for all](#)

A Scotland where no one falls below a set standard of living

Legally ensure all workers receive, as a minimum, the real Living Wage, Living Hours, and Living Pensions.

“[as] A family with both parents working our money is just covering our basic needs and its impacting on our quality of life and life's extra's. Everything has goes up in price and our wages have not.”

A common concern regarding increased government spending on social security is that working people will have to pay more tax. One participant raised concerns that a MIG would create grievances among working people on lower incomes and those not working yet receiving payments. However, as noted, a key focus of a MIG is to support those in work by enhancing fair work principles.^[3]

Our findings indicate that wages and pensions for people on low incomes often fail to ensure a dignified life free from poverty. In our survey, full-time workers stated the following when asked: In your own words, what has been the most significant challenge for you during the cost-of-living crisis?

“Seems like there are a million stuff to pay for that is essential to live a decent way yet all of that things cost 10x more than they did before.”

“I think pretty much everything. I remember we could go out for a meal 2/3 times a week whereas now, going for a meal or ordering a Mcdonalds etc is like a treat!”

While retirees stated:

“Getting through the day and keeping occupied so that I'm not sitting around to much and using gas heating.”

“Cost of food and heating bills.”

“The rise in the price of basic food”

These testimonies reflect wider evidence of in-work and pensioner poverty. Despite record employment levels, around 14% of Scottish working households, 410,000 people, live in poverty^[4], alongside 150,000 people over State Pension age.^[5]

The Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group recommends ensuring all workers receive at least the Real Living Wage and Living Hours by 2030. The Real Living Wage is the only UK wage rate calculated to meet the cost of living. Replacing the minimum wage with this fairer standard would reduce in-work poverty and make employment a positive financial choice.



Living Hours, developed by the Living Wage Foundation, tackles insecure and unpredictable hours. In 2023, over 9% of workers in Scotland, an estimated 250,000 people, were in insecure, low-paid work.^[6] Guaranteeing Living Hours would stabilise incomes and strengthen household security.

We also call for the introduction of Living Pensions, ensuring all workers have access by 2030. This initiative seeks to build pension pots large enough for security and dignity in retirement – something far from reality for many today.

To effectively tackle poverty, work needs to be a positive financial choice which allows people to achieve a good standard of living and fulfil their potential. Fair wages, fair hours, and fair pensions are a huge part of how we achieve that.

[3] Scottish Government (2025), [The Minimum Income Guarantee: a roadmap to dignity for all](#)

[4] Business in the Community (2025), [In-Work Poverty in Scotland: What Employers Need to Know](#)

[5] Independent Age (2023), [Pensioner poverty in Scotland](#)

[6] Ibid

A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs

Ensure that all rental housing is maintained to a minimum standard and introduce a triple-lock rent cap to ensure affordability.

“the amount of properties beside us with derelict landings is massive. It’s good to see it’s not just my building, but it’s horrible.”

Our report includes experiences of poor housing conditions and unaffordable rents. Survey evidence also saw people voice concerns about the affordability of housing.

When asked “What has been the most significant challenge for you during the cost-of-living crisis?” survey respondents answered:

“Being unemployed and not having a significant income always was worrisome, not having enough money for food, rent or bills, always having to ask parents for more money, and waiting for benefits to finally be accepted, which took almost a year.”

“Rent increases and finding affordable housing to meet needs that suit all family.”

“Finding appropriate affordable housing. Saying no to my children when it comes to holidays or expensive activities.”



“Every day we have to choose carefully what to spend on: rent, energy bills, food, clothes. I am still grateful to be in Britain during this difficult time for the whole world, but the pressure of daily financial decisions is very challenging.”

This reflects wider evidence both locally and nationally. By July 2025, average private rents in Aberdeen and the surrounding Shire reached £846 per month, up 4.1% from the previous year.^[7] Across Scotland, rents have risen 61% since 2010, with Edinburgh and Glasgow experiencing even steeper increases.

Meanwhile, over 240,000 people remain on social housing waiting lists, and two-thirds of private rental properties are in poor condition.^[8] Rising rents and housing shortages have intensified in recent years, prompting the Scottish Government to declare a national housing emergency in 2024.^[9]

Participants linked poor housing conditions with wider experiences of poverty, leading them to call for minimum housing standards and rent controls in one of their own policy pledges.

It was agreed that the minimum standard would be defined as sufficiently energy efficient and weather proofed homes. While a triple lock rent-cap would ensure rent prices cannot exceed the rate of inflation, are tied to wage growth, or cannot rise beyond an agreed fixed percentage.

[7] Office for National Statistics (2025) [Housing Prices in Aberdeen](#)

[8] Living Rent (2025) [Rent controls and the housing bill](#)

[9] BBC News (2024) [Scottish government declares national housing emergency](#)

A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs

Implement a new national social tariff for energy.

“We live in one of the richest cities in the UK, we’ve got renewable energy...I don’t understand why we are paying extortionate amounts for fuel.”

Our report shows the difficulties those on low incomes continue to have when paying energy bills. Testimonies from one of the UK’s most energy rich cities revealed people limiting heating, going to bed early, or cutting back on daily activities to cope. Making these choices had a huge impact on health, wellbeing, and dignity.

These findings are replicated across Scotland. In 2023 it was estimated that 34% of households in Scotland were living in fuel poverty. Of those 19.4% were living in extreme fuel poverty. This represented a 38% increase from 2019 – highlighting the devastating impact of the cost-of-living crisis.^[10]



The MIG Roadmap recommends delivering a “new automated national social tariff for energy in Scotland”.^[11] This would be targeted at households on lower-incomes and people who face increased energy costs, including remote communities and disabled people.

This policy would ensure that “no one goes without essential services by 2031”.^[12]

Our manifesto backs that call – and demands all parties take urgent action to support the 34% of households in Scotland experiencing fuel poverty.

“Having to make the decision to be able to eat or heat the house. Having to go to bed early in the winter months to save on heating.”

“Fuel poverty sucks, it’s harder for people in winter. In winter the price is ridiculous, I feel like most of my money goes on fuel in the winter.”

“Heating my house. An hour of energy (Gas alone) cost £1 to £1.25. It was impossible to sustain any kind of warm house on benefits with this being the case.”

Survey Evidence

52%

of respondents had experienced difficulty paying energy bills.

56%

felt that help with energy costs was the support service that would make the biggest difference to them right now.

70%

felt that energy prices and fuel support was the area of government policy that needed to change to improve their situation.

[10] [The Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel \(2025\)](#)

[11] [Scottish Government \(2025\), *The Minimum Income Guarantee: a roadmap to dignity for all*, pg 69.](#)

[12] *Ibid*, pg 69.

A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs

Enhance concessionary schemes and implement affordable fares across public transport.

“no longer having my bus pass has significantly reduced how often I go out somewhere, which has effected my mental health.”

The high cost of transport, and the social isolation this causes, was repeatedly raised as a concern at meetings of the Lived Experience Group and was also mentioned widely in the survey. Challenges around transportation and associated costs were identified as a key barrier to accessing food. While free bus passes were identified as having a hugely positive impact on participants lives. Concerns about the cost of transport to reach appointments related to benefits were raised as a challenge, and again free bus passes were raised as being hugely beneficial.

Transport poverty in Scotland is well accepted as being a serious issue.^[13] Those on low-incomes spend around 14% of their income on transport a figure impacted by rising ticket prices.^[14] For example, bus fares rose by 26% above inflation from 2010–2020.^[15]

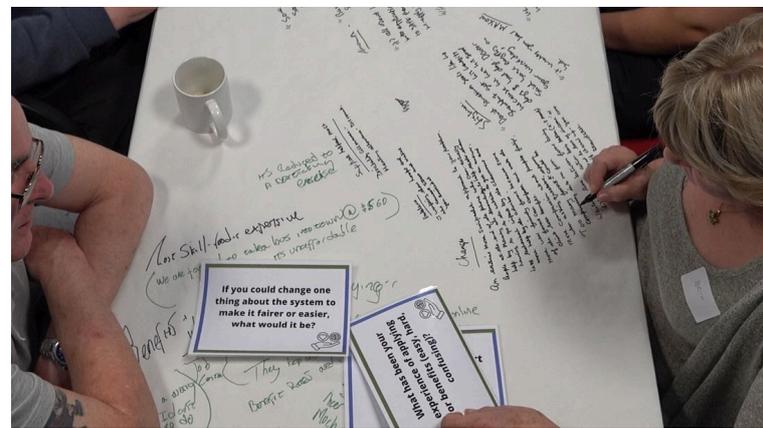


Based on the findings of the Lived Experience Group we have two demands for transport:

1. Enhance concessionary schemes.

“Some people I spoke to got sanctioned due to being late for an appointment because they couldn’t afford the bus ticket.”

We heard from people whose free bus pass was literally life changing. It allowed them to freely leave their house, go shopping for essentials, and connect socially to their communities. We demand that concessionary schemes are enhanced to cover all those on low-incomes.



2. Implement affordable fares to ensure that using public transport is cheaper than the cost of driving.

“My bus pass was brilliant for getting about, especially on low mobility days. Great for my mental health and it meant I had a little extra money for food and utilities.”

For those not included in a concessionary scheme, there should be a national flat rate, which is affordable, cheaper than the cost of driving, and implemented across every form of public transport. This demand echoes work done by Transform Scotland on Fair Fares^[16], and the Poverty Alliance on enhancing concessionary travel schemes.^[17]

[13] Public Health Scotland (2024) [Transport poverty: a public health issue](#)

[14] Transform Scotland (2025) [Mind the Gap: Tackling Transport Inequalities in Scotland](#)

[15] Ibid.

[16] Transform Scotland (2024) [Fair Fares](#)

[17] The Poverty Alliance (2024) [Briefing for Scottish Government Debate: The Future of Public Transport – The Fair Fares Review](#)

A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs

Ensure adequate and fair funding for mental health services.

"I have realised that my mental health issues prevent me from working in my profession, so now I have no career and struggle to earn. It often feels like everything is about money, when people also need support and values beyond money."

The report highlights a strong connection between poverty and mental health, showing how low-incomes and a lack of support create ongoing stress, anxiety, and isolation. Participants described how unclear information and stigma when asking for help left them feeling judged and lacking confidence. Long waiting times for mental health services, alongside gaps in affordable transport, housing, and the cost-of-living, were seen as compounding the problem. Poverty itself was described as exhausting, with constant worry about bills, food, and housing leaving little headspace to live with peace and dignity.

When asked "What has been the most significant challenge for you during the cost-of-living crisis?" survey respondents answered:

"panic and anxiety before bills come out, can I borrow or sell something to ensure we aren't over our overdraft. if something goes wrong, and unexpected bill with the car... it would ruin us, will we lose our home? I can only use the food bank in our village, I cant travel to the one in the next village or town because i have no transport. I also struggle with shame and anxiety that I need to use food bank. both of us, as parents in our, home work, but we still struggle and i lose sleep over it."

"Living day to day, struggling to pay things, worrying all the time. I suffered badly with my Mental health."

"The cost of living is affecting my mental health and physical health. I've had to cut my children's hobbies. I pay for swimming because that's a life skill but they don't go to anything else - too expensive."

"Rising costs are limiting options for the odd day out or to ensure I have power I limit the use of household appliances such as the washing machine and I work full time so feel I should be able to more than cover essentials without penny pinching and anxiety and enjoy the odd day out."

This issue, like many others in our report, is well documented. Comprehensive evidence shows that those experiencing poverty are more likely to face poor mental health outcomes and that living with poor mental health increases the risk of poverty. ^[18]

Survey Evidence

49%

felt that physical or mental health support was the support service that would make the biggest difference to them right now.

We urge all political parties to prioritise tackling the link between poverty and mental health. Introducing a MIG will play a huge role in this – but there also need to be adequately funded mental health support services in place.

A Scotland where access to essential services is guaranteed for all, ensuring people can get the support to meet their needs

Invest in public and third sector services which create supportive environments for individuals and communities to access dignified support, volunteer, and develop skills.

“Life would take a downward spiral without volunteering; volunteering gives me social interaction. I first came to CFINE for a food parcel, I had just lost my mum who I spent 12 years caring for, I needed to get some proper social interaction and build up my CV. Without volunteering at CFINE my mental and physical health would be a lot worse.”

Our report shows that a lack of clear information and experiences of stigma are among the greatest barriers for people on low-incomes trying to access support. Some felt public and third sector organisations did not provide adequate guidance on where to get help or what they were entitled to. Testimonies revealed that stigma and judgement when asking for support created lasting feelings of shame and low confidence.

“number one problem is how to get support you need without being judged.”

It was felt that cuts to local services, like libraries and community centres, and the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, including reduced public face-to-face appointments, have left people more isolated and unaware of the support they are entitled to.

“they’ll cut more things and that’ll create more hurdles...it’s spiralling out of control, like going back to the Victorian ages, scary.”

“a lot of public spaces closed by the council (swimming pools, libraries) creates a lack of faith.”

At the same time, where individuals were signposted to public and third sector services focussed on providing: dignified support to tackle social isolation and poverty, volunteering opportunities, and skills development courses participants described feeling respected, connected, and part of something.

This included positive experiences of essential public sector services like the NHS, community hubs, libraries, and more.

“Being out in the community and being prescribed social activities helped my health the most.”

“it’s great you hear so much about it [Greyhope Community Hub in Torry], especially mens health, growing, childcare...oppression for so long breeds activism and change.”

Participants also had positive experiences of third sector organisations providing volunteering opportunities, employability courses, and stigma free health and wellbeing support.

“Volunteering gets me up in the morning, I would be lost without it, I feel part of it, staff and volunteers are treated the same, I feel a part of a family here and they encourage you to be a part of it.”

“My place on the Warehouse Training course has been a complete game-changer for my mental health and wellbeing.”

These experiences underline the importance of protecting, and developing, infrastructure that allows people to meet, access dignified, well-signposted support, and to develop confidence and skills.

A Scotland that shifts the balance of power to communities

Develop People Panels to promote active citizenship and meaningfully ensure lived experience shapes decisions.

“everyone’s different backgrounds and experiences made me feel reassured to open up.”

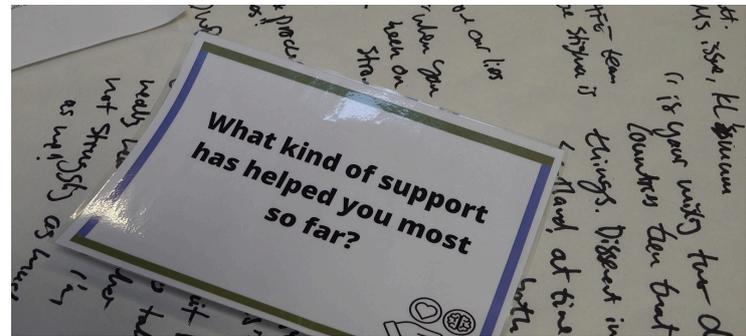
Our report demonstrates the power of lived experience in shaping policy. It highlights how people directly affected by poverty bring key insights that decision makers can overlook. Participants described feeling valued and listened to when their voices were heard. This was achieved in a number of ways including; holding regular meetings over lunch, organising events for the public to input into this manifesto, collaborating with the Scottish Women’s Budget Group, making a film about stigma and poverty with Station House Media Unit, and meeting politicians at the Aberdeen Town House. These opportunities not only improved confidence and reduced isolation but also showed how giving people the opportunity to be heard can lead to active citizenship.



After meeting politicians at the Aberdeen Town House as part of the group one participant stated:

“I’m not worthless, but sometimes you feel it, I felt on top of the world that day, it helped improve my confidence, I felt so good about myself...any future things like that I’ll sign up.”

However, the report also makes clear that such opportunities are rare, with many participants lacking confidence to take part or to approach politicians.



“I would think they wouldn’t listen to me... because I’ve been in the jail. I wouldn’t know how to approach them, what to say... we are little people compared to them...I dunno how to change that...I think it’ll always be like that.”

“a lot of people think it’s [engaging with politicians] a waste of time and just don’t bother...see it as more hassle than its worth.”

People Panels bring together individuals with diverse lived experiences and perspectives to directly shape the work of local community development. We call for parties to build on panels, assemblies, and equality forums already in place across the Scotland, to give them more structure, meaning, and power. Creating more powerful People Panels would ensure local community decisions reflect real life experience and promote fairness.

A Scotland that shifts the balance of power to communities

Develop participatory budgeting initiatives to allow the public to vote on larger pots of funding.

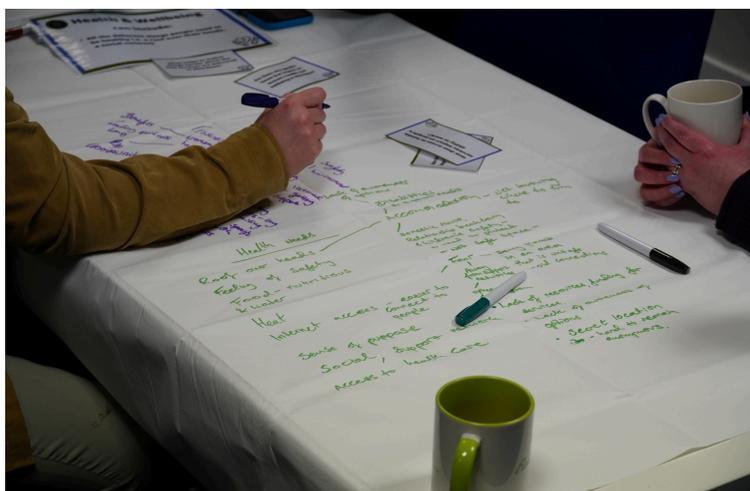
“People also don’t know they can make a change...it’s about trying to change the narrative of the council...more conversations with the public from councils are needed.”

Participatory budgeting (PB) is defined by the Scottish Government as “a democratic process in which citizens decide directly how to spend part of a public budget.”^[17] Our report shows that while the group welcomed the idea of PB as a democratic tool, they also identified barriers that prevent it from reaching its full potential.

Participants agreed that PB can give citizens a voice in how public money is spent, but many felt disengaged, lacking the knowledge, confidence, or resources to participate effectively.

“we don’t know what to say, how to approach it, confusing for people like us.”

“a lot of people don’t even vote...if they don’t do that, they won’t get involved with PB.”



The group argued that for PB to build trust and real engagement, people should be given the chance to influence larger budgets and decisions that directly affect their lives, with better publicity and support from local authorities to take part. This would not only strengthen democracy but also help rebuild a sense of community and fairness in decision-making.



“[government should] encourage people, make them aware, and explain the benefits [of PB].”

“Bigger things could be voted on in PB style as well... [it should be] all over the press, all charities get together, spread news, and make it more visible.”

There is a real appetite among people to get more involved in democratic processes and have their voices meaningfully heard. We urge all political parties to explore options to expand PB and support communities to engage with these initiatives.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read Our Manifesto.

We believe that these policies, grounded in the experiences of those who have lived on low incomes, would significantly reduce poverty in Scotland.

They set out a clear programme to secure a minimum income guarantee, to make work pay, to remove the cost barriers of housing, energy, and transport, to invest in the services that support mental health and community, and to deepen democratic participation so people can impactfully shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Support for these ideas is growing across communities. Now is the moment for political leadership that translates that into policy.



What comes next? Over to you – the politicians we elect. What will it take to make these demands a reality? Inaction is not acceptable or sustainable. We urge you to:

Include these policies into your 2026 Scottish Parliamentary Election Manifestos.

Advocate these policies in Parliament, and across your constituencies, and regions.

Write a formal response to the Lived Experience Group.



There are so many deep and complex challenges being faced by the most vulnerable individuals, families and communities in Scotland, and these can only be overcome with compassion, understanding, and, crucially, political will.



CFINE
2-4 Poynerook Road
Aberdeen
AB11 5RW

www.cfine.org

01224 596156

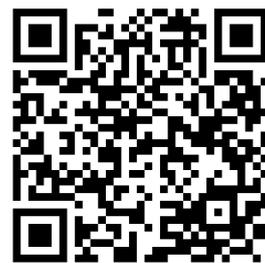
info@cfine.org

Read CFINE's Lived Experience
Report here:



www.cfine.org/files/Lived-Experience-Group-Report-2025.pdf

Find out more about CFINE's Lived
Experience Group here:



www.cfine.org/get-involved/lived-experience-group