

Some people in North East Fife are struggling - now more than ever

A Narrative enquiry - How individuals and families in North East Fife are dealing with the COVID pandemic and recovery



North East Fife covers more than half of the land mass of Fife and is home to one in five of Fife's population. Having such a large rural area brings many unique challenges for residents and service providers. NEF is not associated with issues of poverty and low income however:

- People living in rural areas typically spend 10-20% more on everyday essentials than those living in urban areas.
- NEF has a high percentage of people who are service-deprived – 32%. This is the highest in Fife.

- This means that many people in the area have to take a bus to access a chemist, primary school dentist or doctor · Bus travel is expensive so an unemployed person in Anstruther for example has to not only make a 50 minute journey to access the job centre but also has to pay £9.40 return out of their benefit.
- NEF has the same amount of owner occupiers as the rest of Fife at 60% but there are more housing association and privately rented premises, rents for which are typically higher than council rents. There is also low stock of 3 or more bedroomed local authority houses pushing larger families to the privately rented sector.
- NEF has the lowest weekly average earnings in Fife (£483.30 compared to Fife average £500). Many work in the tourism, care and hospitality sectors.
- Recent research reveals that 27% of children in the St Andrews ward are living in poverty.
- Over 27% of households are living in fuel poverty

COVID Pandemic Hits – Community Led Response



When COVID hit communities in NEF acted swiftly to respond to need. The community spirit that the Local Community Plan highlighted came into its own. Existing community organisations -Community Councils (32 active CCs in NEF),Emergency Committees and new Local Covid Mutual Aid groups all worked to help vulnerable people in their communities.

Within a few weeks around 20 local organisations came together with the Council and started recording and reporting all the work they were doing delivering food parcels, medicine and meals.

Telephone interviews with vulnerable groups



A piece of action research on what it is like to live in NEF after the introduction of Universal Credit was underway when COVID lock down hit and it was decided to continue the research by interviewing those who had accessed support – both financial and food support during the lockdown period.

Sheena Watson Team Manager (Community Development) NEF asked Professor Karen McArdle to continue working with the community development team to carry this out. Karen, has more than 30 years' experience of working in the community conducting rural research, in Scotland and Australia, and has taught research methods in community development contexts for more than 20 of these years. She is the author of text-books on both the impact of community learning and development and research methods; most recently "The impact of Community Work: How to Gather Evidence (2020, Policy Press)." She has lived in Fife for three years, but has worked there in the past and knows the NE Fife area well.

How we reached people



People who needed support during the current crisis were encouraged to contact either Fife Council's COVID Community Helpline or Fife Voluntary Action's Helping Hands contact number and website. Additionally, the Community Development Team and in particular the welfare support workers used a variety of ways to keep in touch and reach out to people either existing or new service users. Early on they used bulk SMS texting to those who had accessed services within the last 6 weeks in order to reach the most vulnerable in our communities.

The sample, that was chosen, as the focus of the study, was disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

This study sought to explore the particular impact of COVID 19, using Narrative Inquiry to explore experience of Covid 19, focusing on the past (prior to Covid 19); the present (experience of lockdown); and the future (what will it be like post lockdown and perhaps into a second lockdown). We chose to also focus on experience linked to the themes of:

- food security;
- financial security;
- social health and well-being (family, relationships).

The research required the direct participation of the staff from Community Development Teams to manage the particular demands of interviewing significantly vulnerable people. The community learning and development staff were well able to manage the difficult conversations that emerged from the research. Staff were trained over 2 days in Narrative Inquiry and the ethical requirements of the research.

The sample, that was chosen, as the focus of the study, was disadvantaged and vulnerable people. In order to find these people, who are seldom heard, we chose to interview people, who had had

food boxes from the Council, or who had accessed other forms of support during Covid 19 lockdown e.g. crisis grants. This was considered to be a good indicator of poverty and experience of financial difficulty or isolation. In some cases, these people were known to community learning and development staff.

The research questions were:

- *What is the experience of disadvantaged residents of NE Fife during Covid 19?*
 - *What are the key issues these people face?*
 - *What will the needs be of these residents, post-lockdown?*
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Who we spoke to – Hidden voice



We interviewed 33 people with a good spread of age and circumstances, such as being alone, being a couple, a single parent or a family with children and both men and women. We reached saturation point with the data at this number and could have interviewed many more people in this vulnerable category, but time and the urgency of the situation did not allow for this. The sample was biased in favour of women, which may have been, because they were the ones who would traditionally seek food for the family.

Those who had had regular food support during lockdown had leaflets explaining that they would be contacted to talk to so people had a lead in time. Following the research all have been contacted

again and full benefit checks completed, and discretionary payments awarded as needed through the Food Fund and British Red Cross Discretionary payment scheme. This has supported the principle of cash first and takes into account the dignity issue which was raised throughout the interviews.

Mood during Covid 19

People's mood during lockdown was complex, with competing emotions but overwhelmingly negative, as the quotations below illustrate. They show the sources of people's disquiet, coming from a range of challenges such as relationships during lockdown; fears for relatives; isolation, as examples. These were all interrelated, as the quotations below illustrate.

"One day he cried, he said I, like, just miss my friends. It's so hard and he's an only child as well. Sometimes it's terrible, like you feel trapped. (Woman, 27, Cellardyke)

"It got harder as time went on. I'm frustrated, I've nothing to do. . . It gets harder. I'm struggling to cope. My depression. . . Missed seeing people. Yea I feel down with everything." (Woman, 24, Cupar)

Trying to keep my son in the house has been awful. He says, I'm not your prisoner, you can't tell me what to do. When you're a teenager you think it won't happen to you, but you could bring the virus back home." (Woman, 46, Cupar)

"Mentally it's not great. Even for the little one (daughter) we don't understand why we're at home and she doesn't. She's been having bursts of rage. To the point that she was raging one night till midnight and all my neighbours heard her and were kept awake. There's nothing I can do when she gets to that point; there's nothing I can do. It's been difficult, it's been very difficult." (Woman, St Andrews)

There were some, a very few, positives that people saw but these were frequently described in the context of negative things and people were looking for a silver lining.

"It (the virus) made me take stock of things. I realised how I was I was trying to please too many people. I didn't realise how overwhelmed I was by trying to please people." (Woman, 46 Cupar)

Relationships

Apart from being part of the general mood of respondents, relationships have been particularly difficult during lockdown for many people, exacerbated by proximity and, contrastingly, by isolation.

"I've been to see my sister outdoors and my niece and been for a walk in the countryside. It makes you see what you miss. You don't really expect a virus to come along its frightening." (Man, 37, Cupar)

"My youngest, it's always been a bit more of a struggle for him. He's missing friends. He's kinda stopped going for bike runs now, he's taken a step back.

I'm on a group chat with a, a few of my friends. They've all got partners. I wish someone would go and get MY tea. I wish someone would do work with my kids so I can get on. Family I've got my mum and dad. . . to be honest we're not exactly a close family anyways. We're all getting on with

things eh? I've got a sister who lives close and my parents are in next village." (Single mother, 44, Newport)

"Three months with my daughter! Horrible! I'm just not used to being basically stuck indoors. My daughter as well she's that used to going out to college. And going to her boyfriend's. She's just been in the house with me. The three months has been different but challenging She's 23. Family and friends are coping fine. Like me they find it challenging being at home Being in the house all the time . . . " (Woman, 42, Cupar)

"When she (her daughter) had a major kick off, I reached out for the doctor, I reached out for the social worker, I've never wanted a social worker involved. I reached out for anybody and everybody because I think she needs some mental health as well, I think she (daughter) needs something to try and control her anger. It all comes to a head. It's just been really difficult. ." (Woman, St Andrews, age not given)

"My youngest one has fallen out with me and that's a bit hard, you know. I just wish things would get back to normal but what's normal going to be?" (Woman, 55, Cupar)

"So, there's just me and my partner. It's not been very nice, it's been a lot of arguments and that. It was up and down before the virus and that made it worse. Before the virus, I could get out a lot. It was difficult. It gave me a wee bit of purpose if you know what I mean it's hard." (Woman, St Andrews)

"My son and daughter is in lockdown with me. It's very difficult with my teenage son, because we're in a refuge and we're not allowed visitors. Family and friends are not coping great but that's life. My dad has emphysema so he's on his own. He's on the 12 week thing; he got a letter from the hospital."

"My son had his 18th birthday and that's normally a family gathering but we had to sit in cars in a car park. So, my parents could at least see him and take the birthday cake up and what not. It's very difficult for him 'cause he's ADHD and OCD and has anxiety and he wanted a hug. But we want him around for his 19th birthday." (Woman Cupar)

Finance



Respondents were prompted to discuss finances and clearly this was an issue for our sample. Only one person, the person quoted immediately below, said this was not a problem and they had had food parcels. Universal Credit was found to be problematical as insufficient and difficult to get. Future financial problems were foreshadowed and this is discussed later in this section. It was also interesting to see how many people discussed the importance of needing to budget very carefully.

"We did manage to get in quite quick with the government. And Fife Council helped us really big time at the beginning. I was shielding. I've got asthma and heart condition" (Man, 49, Cupar)

"Money? Huge effect My husband is not working. And we weren't on Universal Credit because he was working part time Now, we're down a wage and it's just, we're down to half income We're trying to budget as much as possible. Universal Credit is now the only financial support we've had. Will have to get back into work, any work. "(Woman, St Andrews, young family)

"I'm on UC (Universal Credit) And obviously that hasn't changed. (NB UC was in fact raised by £20). I'm off sick from work but because I don't have a contract. I just get the basic £80 a week or something. I've struggled more with electricity 'cause obviously all the kids are at home all the time and they're on their Xboxes. I've gone down to the food bank and L (CLD Worker) organised a food hamper So I wouldn't say I'm any worse off as . . . just because I can't work. I'd say there's more expenditure because the kids are here. The power bills are a hell of a lot more." (Woman, 46, Cupar)

"I'm not getting any benefits I'm just getting my furlough wage and finding it hard. You're just worried about bills and that sort of thing." (Woman, 55, Cupar)

"Money - I'm coping not too badly I make sure all my bills and what not are Food wise - I've used the food bank. And the community fridge. A couple of times. Uncomfortable, but I knew I had to use the food bank For the simple fact that I didn't have the money to fill my cupboards." (Woman, 42 Cupar)

"Money's tight at the moment too. You're not saving on things. Only diesel. I'm buying things to entertain kids. When you add it all up, it's difficult."

Nothing money wise has changed for me. I get tax credit, child benefit, alimony, I have had help with food bank. It's been a godsend. I thank you for that. A box of activities for the kids lifted a weight off my shoulders. It was difficult of me to ask for but like I needed help." (Woman, Single parent, Tayport)

"We're on Universal credit and now we're down a wage. We're adjusting to half income. Trying to budget as much as possible. Trying to budget. Universal credit only financial support I've had. Desperate to get back into any work." (Woman, family, East Neuk)

"Universal credit – I could do with more. Goes into your account on the 12th. I am very hard up. I've paid off most of the debts. Housing rents. You pay your debts off. It goes out first. You pay the debts first. You pay the bills first. Those are still my rules and I have what's left in my back pocket." (Man, 62, East Neuk)

"Finance?- I've been on Universal Credit and that's been quite a painful task. Been a lot of hassle and complications. It's been challenging for both of us. Filling the form in online and having the phone calls and everything and everything else. It's been very, very challenging I feel a bit down about it. People should be more helpful. (Woman, Couple, St Andrews)

"Not had offers of financial help, no vouchers. I could borrow money off my mum, but I don't really want to borrow money off her. I'd still have to pay my mum back; that's how I take it. My mum is a pensioner, so she doesn't have money I have to watch what I spend and be careful of what I get." (Woman, Leuchars, 51)

"It was definitely hard you were coming out of the shop, like, wow that's my budget used! That 100 pounds wasn't actually doing for a week. And buying extras it was, it was, just a lot It was like - I'm spending that amount of money and it's just on food And then there's gas and electric. It's hard." (Woman, Cellardyke, 27)

"I got myself into a lot of financial difficulties. I went part time 'cause my son got into difficulties. I used credit cards and I had a debt of around £36,000. I've had to do part time hours to accommodate my son, so he can come home early. Still doing 32 hours. I've been paying off nearly a year and my biggest fear is, if anything goes wrong with the house, I don't have money. It's my own fault I'm not denying anything. I'm skint constantly. It's a struggle. I'm no going to ask for help. Because it's my mess. I feel I've let my kids down as I can't go on holiday with them. (Crying). I've not told anyone before." (Woman, single parent, Newport)

Food

Arguably, the most worrying part of this study is the food insecurity people were suffering from. In particular, the fact that people indicated sometimes, they were not eating. Most of our sample had accessed food boxes and were grateful for these.

"People do need to go to the work; we need to keep trying to keep it as normal as possible. You get fed up of the four walls and that . . . I used to be in prison I ken what it was like to be in four walls. Food wise I got paid on the 29th and I've been trying to cope with food boxes and food vouchers. I've had no food in the house and been trying to cope. I can catch a rabbit, set a snare and that, if I'm desperate." (Man Howe of Fife)

“We get the foodbank every fortnight. We’re getting more than we ever did, vegetables and things. Got a big bag of shallots and a wee turnip. Don’t know if that’s what it was, but a turnip thing, carrots and that. He’s fussy, prefers plain stuff. At the minute, we’re not too bad, there’s been weeks when we’ve lived off toast. Took money from my pension pot, not a lot, just a little bit for food, but what can you do?” (Woman, Taybridgehead, 57)

“The Hub’s been delivering stuff, tablets and stuff. I can’t fault them they’ve been really, really good. The prices have been extortionate a pint of milk, one, it used to be 1 pound. Yes, it’s been a nightmare for about five or six weeks. My bills have been so expensive I can’t keep it up and I’ve had to organise a home delivery. I just can’t keep up. I couldn’t afford to keep going with them delivering this stuff and all. Full stop, I’m on job seekers I’m not on Universal Credit I didn’t ask for it (UC). Other people can, but I didn’t. I’ve not been getting the extra 20 a week. I’ve been on job seekers, it was fine I had a lot in the freezer, but now!

I wouldn’t use a food bank in Anstruther. I know them all too well. I’ve got plenty of food I was sure to make sure that’s one thing I do have. My electric is cut off.” (Grandmother, East Neuk of Fife)

“Food wise is kind of hard. I do sometimes cook, but other times I just grab a bag of crisps When you’re on your own sometimes you want to eat and sometimes you don’t. I just found out about food boxes because I’m not on benefits, but Jane (friend) told me I didn’t need to be on benefits. Anyone can come down . . . the first time went down with Jane, I didn’t come in because I felt I was depriving somebody else from food. I am struggling some days you know. You get your wages you still got other bills to pay you know. You just take what you need you know.” (Woman, 55 Cupar)

“It’s worth coming to the community fridge to meet the people. I like interacting with other people that’s why I do the volunteering at the Red Cross because it’s the other people. Is different people every day, so I speak to different people.” (Woman 42, Cupar)

“I’ve never had benefits other than community welfare. I’ve had one crisis grant of £50. I was rejected for other benefits, as I can still walk, so I’m not eligible. Went to food bank in Dundee once, as I needed. A wee fit up. I kinda held out for as long as I could. I got a couple of food boxes this time, which were a great help. It’s been really tricky all the time. I’m told to shield myself, but I do not meet the criteria. But my immune systems is gone. . . Last year I had food poisoning and ended up in Ninewells. It’s been difficult, really difficult with food. My neighbour is shielding and she gets boxes and boxes and she gives to me the extra” (Man, 37, Cupar)

“There is a local lady who got money to help. I was referred to her. I wouldn’t have asked for help myself, but someone told her about me. She has been buying food and dropping it in. She got money to do that, but it’s all finished now. I got the food boxes you (Fife Council) sent; they’ve been good. The kids opened the 3 big boxes when they arrived and ate all the biscuits.” (Woman, 27 Taybridgehead)

“We’ve been going to the Co op. Food shopping and that. Is quite pricey. Food shopping at the Co op is quite expensive. I used to go to Aldi. There’s difference between Co op prices and Aldi prices. Definitely. Coming out of the Co op I couldn’t get a week’s worth. I’d like get a week’s worth, at a push, with my money.” (Woman, 27, East Neuk)

Fuel

Fuel issues have already featured in some of the quotations given, but fuel was considered by the majority to be a worry, as part of their trouble with finances. Fuel poverty will be even more of an issue if the virus continues in a second phase into winter.

"My electric was just cut before Covid 19. I was paying so much; now it's getting paid from my bank account. I phoned my company to help me, but they didn't get back to me. He's (A, her son) switching lights on and on his desktop all night, so electric is all I can do. I'm just paying what I can. They wanted £150 but I couldn't afford that, so I cut it down to £100. I got a call from Cosy Kingdom. My heating is not on. But it has been cold so I have had to put immersion on, but I can't afford it. I no ken what it is at the moment 'cause I cannot work it out myself. You're using more and more 'cause you're watching telly, telly mair, Xboxes mair, and the phone. " (Woman, 62, Newburgh)

*"Fuel- We have a card I have to go to Saint Andrews to get it on. You don't know how long the machine is going to be working. My house is cold as the tiles we put the carpet on top, but it's cold. **I can't get the electric heater working. They programme it all in. You know it's a new system and it is trying to get it fixed in.** You got to even programme the cold water coming out."* (Woman, 51, Leuchars)

"I went onto pre-paid thing before lockdown so it's fine now. I spoke to Cosy Kingdom who are going to put things down the back of my radiator and new curtains, but they never came back." (Woman, single parent, Taybridgehead)

"Cosy Kingdom. Given card payments." (Woman, age not given, East Neuk)

"No fuel support. I make things manage. I don't use very much gas. I've rarely used a lot of gas. Electric costs a lot, it goes on tv, bath and that. You are using more of that. I generally am all right." (Man, older man, East Neuk)

"Fuel is an issue that I have. Got my new cards but I haven't worked it out yet. I pay direct debit for my gas, so I've never paid electricity. I need to phone Npower. They've been investigating it, for I don't know how long. I'm going to have a massive bill to pay. (Interviewer tells him there's help) I'm fine normally. I'll get another job. I need money coming in." (Man, 37, Cupar)

Future

The interviewers asked about people's views of the future. Some chose to focus on Council services, some were more general about the virus. There were no views that could be considered positive about the future

"Future, hellish! I don't think there will be a future. I think it will be people just existing. The only people who will have jobs will be social workers and the like. I've just been keeping myself busy taking the dog for a walk." (Man Howe of Fife)

"Future - I don't have a computer. Trying to get online to do the Universal Credit is just impossible. I've been down to the Cosmos centre and used the computer, but I can't. I just want to get back to the classes as soon as possible 'cause that'll help. A lot of people are struggling." (Man, working age, St Andrews)

I don't, I don't know I can't go back to work until I have childcare that's all I can do.” (Woman, single mother, St Andrews)

“Very hard times, you just wonder what the new normal will be. Before the virus I went to visit friends and that, my cousins and that, they are quite local. We keep in touch every Sunday. I don't like it now, time phoning people. I don't like it. I like seeing face to face people.

“Hopefully, it will get better but with the economy right now and with prices going up. I don't know if it will ever get better.” (Woman, young family, East Neuk)

“I know about crisis grants and it would help not to use that again. I would prefer cash. I would like community fridge for food. I would volunteer again when things get better. ” (Man, 37, Cupar)

“Cash. Cash be more helpful. Cash, more easier to work with than other things.” (Woman, 25 Cupar)

“Voucher would be good, but cash, cash would be better because then I can shop around. I usually go to Lidl for some things and other places for other things so vouchers would mean I couldn't shop around for best deals or get things I like.” (Woman, single parent, Taybridgehead)

“I wish someone could come in here and do work with my kids just once a week. That would be a huge help for relief.” (Woman, 44, Newport)

“L and K (Community workers) make the odd phone call. I think the odd phone call from them helps mental health. When I was forced to go to the Job Centre it was compulsory and a complete and utter waste of time . . I find much more help at the Job Club than at the compulsory one. Every penny spent on Job Club is worthwhile Compulsory Service as good as a chocolate fireguard . . .

. . . Perhaps some kind of prepaid card. Yes that would be a good idea.” (Woman, 65, Cupar)

“I've had Fife Council support during lockdown. They should help other people not be able to manage their money and that. Just if they could give them a call and see. If there's a list or that they could put their names on. A lot of people without gardens and the elderly. A lot of old people worry about that more than young people that their garden is in a mess and that. Maybe just give an ear to listen to somebody. It is difficult you can't go in and chat to them.” (Woman, 59, East Neuk)

“Aye I had welfare fund. Cosy Kingdom gave us gas. She was amazing the Council woman, she needs promoted. Council got us it (money) from some charity. Very helpful.” (Man, 49, Cupar)

The interviewees were generally quite resilient or represented themselves this way. It was, however, difficult, to ask for help. Only one person felt fine about it.

“When I had a job, I had everything planned to buy things for the baby. And having everything right for the baby. I need resources just to provide for my children and for the baby; before that I could do that, but now, I feel useless.” (Woman, St Andrews, young family)

“The support that I think should be available is just someone to chat to now and then. I don't know anything else. I was born and brought up here, so I know all the people and if there was befriending, I'd know all the people. I'll go to the doctor on Monday and see what he has to say. I, I don't like talking to people I don't know. I hear people are all just meeting up and that gets on my nerves that they're not obeying the rules.” (Woman, East Neuk, Grandmother)

“Community fridge. I felt very awkward I felt like a bit of a pauper. Oh God, you're a nurse, you shouldn't be down here. How embarrassing this is for people who are on benefits. That can't work.” (Woman, 46, Cupar)

“I've used the food bank and the community fridge, a couple of times. Uncomfortable, but I knew I had to use the food bank. For the simple fact that I didn't have the money to fill my cupboards.” (Woman, 42, Cupar)

“If I didn't have someone to put my name forward, I don't know how I would have got this (food from food bank). There would have been no one. Where we live it would be like YOU (meaning self) coming forward for that. I wouldn't like to ask. I don't know how that could be changed. I don't know. I Get embarrassed to ask for the help.” (Woman, 44, Newport)

Issues Highlighted by the research



Poverty

Poverty was a strong issue and underpinned many other problems people faced. It was shocking, for example, to find that people were not eating in some cases. Food parcels had been very important to people and there is no reason to think that This need will not continue, especially if we enter a second phase of lockdown. Volunteering had helped substantially to provide food for our respondents, but there is a danger of 'volunteering-fatigue' post-lockdown and when volunteers return to work, or think the crisis is over.

Poverty is linked to inherent problems with Universal Credit. **The impact on the Scottish Tourism industry has been huge and this has affected Fife more strongly than the Scottish average, in**

terms of the need for businesses to reduce staff, so unemployment will contribute more strongly to poverty in the immediate future (Monitoring Effects of Covid 19 on Scottish Tourism Industry - Wave 2 results 20 – 30 March, 2020, Scottish Government). The amount of Universal Credit was insufficient for our respondents. Professor Sir Michael Marmot (2020) has underscored the link between poverty and food security. If those on benefits subscribe to the NHS Eatwell Guide, they will need to spend 75% of their disposable income on food which will leave nothing for rent, gas and other costs. The most deprived, he asserts, spend more than a third of their income on housing and in the Covid 19 period, food insecurity has doubled. It was apparent in this study that some people were accessing food parcels for the first time, whilst for others it was a way of normal life. Professor Sir Michael Marmot also pointed to the negative wage growth in the UK between 2007 and 2018, which he said was continuing; the UK was third place in terms of negative wage growth behind Greece and Mexico. This underpins the fact that some people who still had an income were accessing food parcels. The nature of work in hospitality and tourism, seasonal, part time and often low paid, which has been badly hit by Covid 19 and is a feature of work in NE Fife, suggests food parcels will be an ongoing requirement.

The future employment situation in NE Fife was a concern to both those seeking work and those already in work but unsure of the future status of jobs, as indicated by the illustrative quotations below.

“Yes, I want to find out if work is going to open up again. I got an email about a first aid and health and hygiene course. My name is on the waiting list, but I went to find out if they worked online or if I could do it anywhere. I went to the job club. That stopped because of the COVID-19. So I would say I just wait and see what else happens and if there's any other courses, but I am applying for jobs I'm just waiting to see what happens eh? I don't want to work too far away because it's the bus fare that takes it. I did have the travel vouchers I've got a couple left because we've not really been using them. I was using them, because I was going to Cupar all the time to go on a course.”

“Initially I was OK, I had a wee job. Then it went I went to the job club and that. I'm getting a bit frustrated 'cause I don't know what the job situation will be like when this is over. “

Accessing Universal Credit appears to be a problem for those who do not have access to the Internet and, even for those who do, it was an issue in terms of difficulty to access and getting a response. **Digital poverty was also an issue with home schooling and a clear preference for workbooks to come home for pupils for those without printers.**

Cash as support, rather than vouchers, was preferred. One person's suggestion of a prepaid card is worth considering.

Many of the issues linked to poverty felt outside the control of the individuals interviewed. Fife Council is committed to community led services and the Communities Directorate has annual reporting on this and the national Household Survey quality of life indicator of how people feel they can influence decision making. **Supporting people to take local action on issues in their communities is a key area where more focus would improve people's experience of living in the area and their day to day lives.**

Dignity



The dignity of individuals is also worthy of consideration. Without exception, there was evidence our respondents were doing the best they could with difficult life experience. Most attempted to put on a brave face. It is important that all future measures for the well being of vulnerable people take dignity into account. Stigma associated with use of food banks was apparent and cash was the preferred means of support, as it holds no stigma, is flexible and can be used according to need.

Community Spirit



The third sector and volunteers have stepped up dramatically during the pandemic but, the danger that this will dissipate as agencies suffer themselves from the effects of Covid 19 on their viability, suggests that emphasis should be placed on supporting communities to support themselves. It will assist with the acceptance and inclusions of those who are vulnerable, thereby contributing to mental well being. It will assist communities to work for themselves to seek solutions to problems.

Since the first piece of action research the NEF Community Development Team undertook in 2018 on what it was like to live in NEF on a low income, awareness appears to have grown amongst the general population of the presence of vulnerable people in the NE Fife community. This report, "NEF A dream place to livefor some " has influenced community councils, development trusts and other groups to help them address local issues. This is important as there are many third sector organisations in the area who are able to provide support and pull in resources to grow and develop projects that meet local need.

The narrative of NE Fife as a rich, tourist haven has begun to change and this change has been exacerbated by the global pandemic, with the concomitant impact on hospitality and tourism. We have, however, in this study possibly just seen the tip of the iceberg of people who are vulnerable in NE Fife. A second phase of the virus will hit people even harder and will place additional demands on all levels of the government and third sector in particular to manage the economic, social and psychological repercussions.

Community Identity and Belonging



NE Fife is well placed to engage in the process of enhancing resilience as its residents value their physical location highly. Communities that are resilient have healthy and engaged people and have an inclusive culture, which creates a positive sense of place (Carnegie, 2011). The North East Fife Area Local Community Plan highlights the good community spirit and high levels of community involvement in many areas within NEF and the track record of community involvement within the

area. To improve participation, people need to see what difference it will make, and feel that any decisions made are the result of a collaborative process.

Specific Recommendations

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

1. **Dissemination of findings** A workshop be held to raise awareness of issues raised and to discuss progress with partners concerning issues related to 'Some People Struggle: Now More Than Ever' in NE Fife. (**Zoom conference on the findings of the research was held on the 9th September 2020 - 46 attended including elected members for the area, community organisations and Housing, Communities and Neighbourhoods and Social Work staff.**)
2. **Food Insecurity short term**-In the short term, attention needs to be paid to likely ongoing food insecurity, especially if 'volunteer fatigue' affects current distribution by volunteers in the community. This is of particular concern for those isolated in rural areas.
3. **Food Insecurity longer term** - In the longer term there is a need to work with community anchor organisations to develop initiatives which address food insecurity with dignity - for example Community Fridges.
4. **Community Spirit**- Attention should be paid to building community spirit through stimulating and supporting community participation and raising the capacity for individuals and communities to take local action.
5. **Rural Poverty**- The work identified as a priority in the North East Fife Local Outcome improvement Plan (LOIP) on rural poverty needs to continue at a pace , with action research remaining a key feature to ensure the voice of those living in poverty and on low incomes is heard and acted on.
8. **Access to services** -Fife Council to raise awareness across all services and partners of the importance of understanding rural poverty and lack of access to services experienced by many communities in NEF.
9. **Raising Awareness of rural poverty**-Scottish Government and other providers of funding be made aware of the progress that has taken place in identifying rural poverty issues and ways communities are starting to address these.
10. **Financial Support** -Adopt a cash first principle. Stigma associated with use of food banks was apparent and cash was the preferred means of support, as it holds no stigma, is flexible and can be used according to need.

Many of the interviews lasted an hour and were seemingly cathartic for the vulnerable people, who appeared to welcome the opportunity to discuss troubling issues with a sympathetic listener.

The interviews provide an overview of the character of complex issues individuals face in the NE of Fife in the pandemic and an insight into its likely impact post-lockdown. Thank you to the staff of the NEF Community Development Team who conducted the interviews - Laiza Lorimer, Katrina Breslin, Karen Scott, Caroline Berry, Gordon Forbes, Vicki Blair, Lesley Pringle and Katy Bald.

Sheena Watson 26/10/2020