

# History, politics and vulnerability: explaining excess mortality in Scotland and Glasgow

**Section 7: Policy recommendations**  
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## 7. Implications and responses

As summarised in Part Six, the principal contributory components of the two models presented in Part Five are an inadequate measurement of deprivation, alongside a number of important historical processes and developments which, in combination, have rendered Glasgow and Scotland more vulnerable to key socioeconomic and political exposures. A range of sub-topics are part of that broader explanation. In light of that, therefore, what are the most appropriate policy responses to address these issues?

### *From research to policy*

In assessing responses for Glasgow (and the wider area) in particular – the city and area with the highest levels of excess mortality in Scotland – it is important to reflect on the ‘context’ diagram in Part Four (Figure 10). That emphasised two important points:

1. Particular parts of Britain (including Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester) have been subjected to the same historical, socioeconomic and political negative exposures: high levels of deindustrialisation and associated poverty and deprivation, and UK economic policies which entrenched the cities at the bottom end of a widening spectrum of inequality in the UK. It is no coincidence that in the early decades of the 20th century premature mortality rates were (a) higher in these cities compared with elsewhere in Great Britain but (b) similar in all three cities.
2. Processes that rendered Glasgow’s population more vulnerable to those exposures resulted in the Scottish city falling behind the English areas in mortality terms in the latter half of the 20th century.

On top of this, there is also a need to consider further, future, vulnerabilities which are likely to emerge from the effects of UK government changes to social security, as well as other government policy on social protection, and reduced public spending.

Thus, policy responses must address three overlapping issues simultaneously:

1. to protect against key exposures (e.g. poverty, deprivation) which impact detrimentally across the whole UK (but especially in places like Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester);
2. to address the accumulated consequences of Glasgow’s greater vulnerability and the impact of exposures over time;
3. to mitigate against the effects of future vulnerabilities linked to current UK government policy.

The important factors which emerge from this analysis – poverty and deprivation, and exacerbated inequality linked to current, past and future vulnerabilities – are intractably entwined. Thus the policy recommendations presented here (made in agreement with all the representatives of public health, and other disciplines, who are signatories to this report) are not set out separately in relation to the three issues above. Instead they are presented together, grouped under four thematic headings: national economic policy (including, specifically, the need to redistribute income and wealth to narrow economic and, by extension, health inequalities in society); housing and the physical environment; additional

actions in relation to local government and partner organisations; and understanding deprivation. As will become apparent, there are also clear overlaps between these headings.

The recommendations have been drawn from different sources: some follow directly from specific research findings; some reflect existing evidence of appropriate responses to issues highlighted in the report; and others have been proposed by others with expertise in the relevant policy areas.

### **National economic policies**

A key point emphasised throughout this report, and elsewhere, is that **economic policies matter for population health**. Widening inequalities in health are a consequence of more general widening inequalities across society, most notably measured in terms of income inequalities. Although the most important fiscal policy levers still remain under Westminster control, it is of paramount importance that **all opportunities available within Scotland are taken to redistribute income and wealth** across Scottish society. These opportunities include those presented by the devolution of new powers listed in the 2016 Scotland Act<sup>249</sup>. Specific policy recommendations aimed at achieving this are listed below. It should be noted that some of these echo recommendations made by other organisations, including some included within a recent NHS Health Scotland Income Briefing<sup>250</sup>, as well as policies (highlighted below) which are the subject of proposals by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)<sup>251</sup>.

1. **Economic strategy:** making the reduction of income and wealth inequalities the central objective of economic policy is important. It is increasingly recognised that more equal distribution of income and wealth leads to wealthier, healthier, more resilient and democratic economies (even amongst bodies previously advocating a growth-first approach such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>252</sup> and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>253</sup>). Aside from all the other societal benefits this would bring, placing the reduction of income inequalities at the heart of policy would help the Scottish Government to achieve its stated aims of achieving 'inclusive growth'<sup>254</sup> and reducing poverty and inequality<sup>255</sup>.
2. **Ownership:** policies which reduce inequalities in the ownership of capital (e.g. land, housing and shares) are likely to contribute to greater equality of incomes. Models of co-operative ownership (e.g. of companies or land) also have potential to enhance equity.
3. **Income and corporate taxation:** increased tax take and greater progressivity in taxation (i.e. a steeper marginal taxation as incomes increase and a fairer alternative to the council tax) would reduce income inequalities and provide greater resources for redistribution and public services.
4. **Wealth and asset taxation:** there is a need to identify ways of redistributing assets more fairly (e.g. land) and taxing the proceeds of wealth (e.g. through a more progressive Land & Buildings Transactions Tax).

5. **‘Fair work’ and wages:** support the vision set out in the Fair Work Framework<sup>256,257</sup>, to ensure that all work in Scotland offers security, fulfilment and respect. This would include the introduction of a **Scottish living wage** at a level which exceeds that proposed by the UK government, and which would reduce the ratio between the highest and lowest earners. Greater income security (e.g. by providing a guarantee of hours for those who wish them) is another important component of wages policy. Removing barriers to worker organisation and ownership may also ensure that there is a rebalancing of power between the owners of wealth and those who work to create it (e.g. through greater collective bargaining). Although employment law remains a reserved matter, the Scottish Parliament has influence over public sector pay and the supply chain of the public sector.
  
6. **Industrial policy:** diversify the economy to foster more resilience to change (e.g. reduce reliance on the financial services sector and oil industry) and provide support for those sectors which produce high quality and well-paid jobs in areas of greatest need.
  
7. **Social security:** the social security system must ensure that all in society have sufficient income, and provide the basis from which people can develop their skills and provide for the needs of their families. This would involve increased levels of protection and less conditionality, such as would be the case with a Citizen’s Income<sup>258</sup>. It will be important to use all opportunities offered by the partial devolution of benefits in the Scotland Act 2016, and to build on existing mitigation (e.g. on housing benefit changes), to protect geographical, equality group, and socioeconomic populations at greatest risk. If possible, this should include reversing the effects of UK government cuts and reforms (e.g. to tax credits, incapacity benefits, housing benefit and child benefits), thereby ensuring the provision of a more effective ‘safety net’ for the most vulnerable in society. In addition, there may be opportunities to change the administration and culture of (aspects) of the system to one that is centred around the needs of claimants.
  
8. **Addressing the costs of living:** reducing costs which impact most on the poorest groups (including childcare, housing, heating, transport and food) relative to income is an important component in a strategy to reduce poverty and inequality. In particular:
  - a. The **creation of an ‘anti-poverty childcare system’** is important. This is a specific proposal by the JRF, and is based on flexible, year-round child care provision (as already exists for school-age education), professionally qualified staff earning salaries comparable with those working in schools, and an affordable fee system which includes free access to childcare for those on low incomes. Evidence cited in the JRF proposals suggest such a transformation in pre-school childcare would be cost effective in the long run as later savings (e.g. from reduced social security payments, higher pay,

lower costs to criminal justice systems) would exceed the investment many times over. More importantly, such a transformation would have major benefits across all Scottish society, potentially conferring protection against future vulnerabilities.

- b. **Reduction of the ‘poverty premium’ (i.e. the proportionally higher costs of goods and services faced by those living in poverty).** New measures in relation to this issue have been proposed by the JRF. Specific recommendations include: changes to the role and remit of competition authorities and regulatory bodies (e.g. strategies to identify, monitor and reduce disadvantage among those in poverty); establishment of innovation funds to encourage third sector and not-for-profit companies to develop products appropriate to the needs of those on low incomes (e.g. specialist insurance policies); enabling interventions such as ‘collective switching’ in the energy market; facilitating ‘transactional banking’ based on partnerships between banks and third sector organisations; enabling access to small loans (e.g. through developments to the social finance market or by provision of ‘micro-finance’ in the banking sector); and various initiatives to improve energy efficiency (and thereby reduce costs).
  - c. Alongside the establishment of a living wage, the **implementation of the JRF’s proposal for a ‘living rent’**, whereby social housing rental costs would be directly linked to local earnings, would make housing costs across the country fairer, and lower the cost of living for some sections of the population.
  - d. The cost of **public transport** is significant for those living in poverty. This is particularly the case for those living in Glasgow’s peripheral estates and Scotland’s rural areas, where amenities are few and journeys to higher amenity locations are long, expensive and can involve a number of stages. While transport services may be better managed locally, free or subsidised transport for those on low incomes could significantly improve accessibility to education, employment and services, particularly for those living in more isolated locations.
9. As others have previously recommended (e.g. Oxfam Scotland<sup>259</sup>, The Poverty Alliance<sup>260</sup>), the Scottish Government should **adopt a ‘poverty proofing’ approach to all policies and major spending decisions.**
  10. Related to this, and in recognition of the unique health challenges facing Scotland, the Scottish Government should **adopt the World Health Organization’s principle of ‘Health in all policies’**<sup>261</sup> in order to more explicitly address issues relating to the social determinants of health and health inequalities in Scotland.

## Housing and the physical environment

Another key aspect of vulnerability identified in the report relates to the physical environment – particularly (and specifically in relation to Glasgow) the availability of good quality housing and the distribution of this housing within the city among social groups. Partly as a result of the substantial deindustrialisation experienced in Glasgow, and of the need to demolish substandard housing, there remains a large quantity of derelict land in the city. Policy to improve housing in the city and the physical environment are therefore important, and could include:

11. A substantial **expansion of the social housing building programme** of high quality, low rent, sustainable, social housing. The JRF sees the expansion of affordable housing as being a priority call upon new borrowing and bond issuing powers afforded to the Scottish Parliament.
12. **An extension of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard<sup>262</sup> to the private rented sector and tied housing.**
13. **Targeting cold and damp housing and people who struggle to afford fuel** by implementing affordable heating, ventilation and quality energy efficiency measures in all housing both new and existing properties (without the need to apply for grants) with a focus on private rented and owner occupied sectors.
14. Related to the above, ensuring **maintenance and repair funding for social housing** is at an adequate level, and is protected from any impact of cuts to public services.
15. **Strengthening the impact of the Place Standard for Scotland<sup>263,xxxv</sup>** by: providing ongoing support for its development and delivery; making it a ‘material consideration’ in the spatial planning system for private and public sector development; and investing in support for communities from deprived areas to use it.
16. **Improving greenspace access and quality in deprived areas** by: providing access to good quality greenspace within 300m of the home for all; addressing current inequalities in greenspace quality; and supporting engagement in outdoor activities (including spaces for all to support intergenerational mixing and spaces to play that challenge children and allow for risk taking).
17. **Improving neighbourhood maintenance according to need and deprivation levels** by ensuring that CPPs, Local Authorities and Scottish Government work together to identify mechanisms to support the ongoing maintenance of streets and open, green, and public spaces, and ensure that environmental incivilities,

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<sup>xxxv</sup> The Place Standard has been developed by Scottish Government Architecture & Place, NHS Health Scotland and Architecture & Design Scotland. Its purpose is “to support the delivery of high quality places in Scotland and to maximise the potential of the physical and social environment in supporting health, wellbeing and a high quality of life”.

crime and anti-social behaviour do not act as disincentives to their use and enjoyment.

18. **Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists** by establishing 20mph zones, area-wide traffic calming schemes, and segregation of pedestrians, cyclists and traffic, as the norm for residential and urban areas.

#### **Additional actions in relation to local government and partner organisations<sup>xxxvi</sup>**

A number of the above recommendations relate to local, as well as national, government. Further, specific, recommendations relating to local government (including Glasgow in particular) and partner organisations include:

19. The need to **recognise, understand and act upon – at the highest levels of local government – the impact of local decision making on population health**. This includes the need to understand the need for – and protective benefits of – **strong civic leadership** in times of political and economic difficulty.
20. The need to avoid repeating historical mistakes and ensure that we **create, and keep together, viable and supportive communities, and build further affordable public sector housing**.
21. Local government also has a part to play in **distributing income**, with progressive use of proceeds from a **fairer system of local taxation** (e.g. in redistributing resources towards areas of greater need).
22. There is also an argument that current local authority boundaries prevent adequate redistribution across the country. Given the controversial manner in which the boundaries were created in the 1990s<sup>264,265</sup>, **the boundaries and/or the funding allocation system for local government should be reviewed** with the explicit objective of ascertaining whether any potential changes could more effectively facilitate resource distribution across Scotland.
23. As with national government, a **‘poverty proofing’** approach to local government (and partner organisation) policy-making should be adopted, alongside the WHO’s **‘health in all policies’**.
24. Related to the above, an approach to local policy-making should be adopted which explicitly embraces previously identified **actions to narrow inequalities at the local level**<sup>266</sup>. The latter include: implementation of the living wage at a level and coverage recommended by the Living Wage Foundation<sup>xxxvii</sup> (and in the case of Glasgow City Council in particular this should include the various ‘arm’s-length external organisations’ (ALEOS)); adoption of 20mph speed limits across the whole city (mentioned above); and taking ‘health first’ approach to tackling worklessness.

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> ‘Partner organisations’ include Health & Social Care Partnerships and Community Planning Partnerships.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> See: <http://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-living-wage>

25. In the case of Glasgow City and the other local authorities within the Glasgow and Clyde Valley region<sup>xxxviii</sup>, consideration should be given as to how to maximise the potential of **City Deals**<sup>267</sup> investment to help mitigate against the effects of vulnerability in the population (e.g. through capital investment in social housing or the creation of sustainable high quality employment).

### **Understanding deprivation**

Finally, there are a number of aspects of the excess mortality phenomena that we do not understand sufficiently, and there are, therefore, a number of research priorities which flow from this work. A full list of such priorities are listed in the next section of the report. However, one in particular is highlighted here, given its particular importance to the explanatory models presented in the report and its links to the issue vulnerability discussed above:

26. There is an urgent need to prioritise **further research on the true nature of deprivation** in Scotland that is not captured by existing data and measurements. The evidence included within this report strongly suggests that the 'lived reality' of living in socially and materially deprived circumstances in Scotland differs from elsewhere in Britain, and it is imperative that new research, perhaps based on ethnographic methodologies and involving a comparative approach, is undertaken to better understand those differences, and to formulate appropriate policy responses.

Overall conclusions, alongside additional recommendations for further research, resulting from all the work presented in this report are included in the next, and final, section.

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<sup>xxxviii</sup> As defined by the UK government's 'City Deal' report<sup>267</sup>, these are: East Dunbartonshire; East Renfrewshire; Glasgow City; Inverclyde; North Lanarkshire; Renfrewshire; South Lanarkshire; and West Dunbartonshire.