

The Covid-19 Pandemic in Greater Easterhouse

Its impact, the community's response, and the need to build back FAIRER

Report to Easterhouse Housing and Regeneration Alliance by JH Consulting (August 2021)

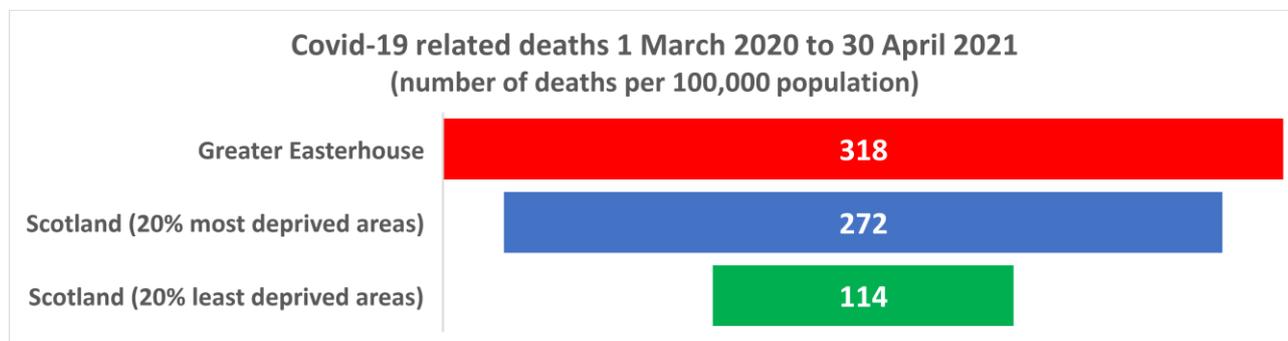
REPORT SUMMARY

This report was commissioned by the Easterhouse Housing and Regeneration Alliance (EHRA), the grouping of eight independent community-controlled social housing providers in Greater Easterhouse. The key issues addressed in the report include:

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Greater Easterhouse residents and communities.
- The community response to Covid-19, led by EHRA members and other local organisations.
- How Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government contributed to the local pandemic relief effort.
- The key issues that a Covid recovery strategy should address in Greater Easterhouse.

Covid-19 Death Rates in Greater Easterhouse

From the very start of the pandemic, death rates from Covid-19 were twice as high in Scotland's most deprived communities, compared to the most affluent areas. In Greater Easterhouse, 80 residents lost their lives to Covid-19 between 1 March 2020 and 30 April 2021. Per head of population, Greater Easterhouse had a Covid-19 death rate that was **almost three times (2.8 times) higher** than the rate in Scotland's least deprived communities, an outcome that can only be described as shocking.^{1,2}



Social and Economic Impacts of Covid-19

Greater Easterhouse residents have also experienced serious social and economic harms caused by Covid-19. Some of the reasons are due to the virus itself, such as prolonged social distancing restrictions and greater exposure to the virus among low-paid workers (particularly women) who were obliged to keep going to work in sectors such as social care and essential retail. However, Covid deaths and hardship in Greater Easterhouse are also **structural in nature**, linked inextricably to the prevalence of poverty and inequality in the community not just for years but for decades. For example:

¹ Most/least deprived areas defined by National Records of Scotland as the 20% most deprived and 20% least deprived *Intermediate Zones* in the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

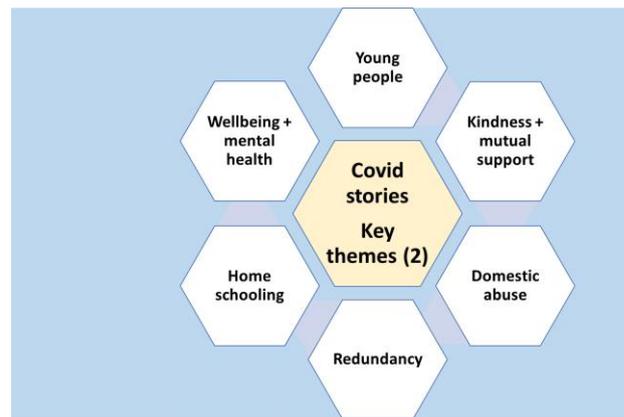
² Deaths Involving Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Scotland, National Statistics, published by National Records of Scotland

- In the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 18 of the 20 small areas in Greater Easterhouse were in the 10% most deprived in Scotland while 13 of the 20 areas were in the 5% most deprived.
- In 2020 people living in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland were 18 times more likely to have a drug-related death than those in the least deprived areas.
- The gap in life expectancy in Glasgow is widening between the city's least and most deprived neighbourhoods (the gap is now reported to be 15 years for males and 12 years for females).^{3, 4}

Faced with a global pandemic on top of these existing challenges, Greater Easterhouse residents had a much lower level of resilience to the impact of Covid-19 than people living in better off areas.

The Impact of Covid-19: Residents' Stories

The report sets out the personal stories of a number of Greater Easterhouse residents, to capture their experiences of the impact of Covid-19. It also draws on discussions with front-line staff and volunteers in community organisations who supported many people through the most difficult of times. The main areas that emerged during the conversations are summarised below.



Similar issues will have been present in many Scottish communities. What is very different about Greater Easterhouse is the frequency and severity of Covid impacts, because of the lower levels of resilience already described.

Residents commonly had problems with being able to afford food and higher heating bills caused by more time spent at home; reductions in working hours and therefore income; the failure of the furlough scheme and Universal Credit to work fairly for everyone; and the loss of social and family support for older people and others who were vulnerable. Critically, residents lacked any financial resources set aside for a "rainy day". Across the piece, money worries, social isolation and other threats to wellbeing were the most frequent and damaging issues people were facing.

³ Drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2020, National Records of Scotland, 31 July 2021

⁴ Health in a changing city: Glasgow 2021, Glasgow Centre for Population Health, August 2021

The Local Response to Covid-19

Greater Easterhouse has a strong network of community organisations which supported people and communities during the pandemic. These organisations included:

- **The network of eight community-controlled, neighbourhood-based housing associations**
 - Blairtummock Housing Association
 - Calvay Housing Association
 - Easthall Park Housing Co-operative
 - Gardeen Housing Association
 - Lochfield Park Housing Association
 - Provanhall Housing Association
 - Ruchazie Housing Association
 - Wellhouse Housing Association.
- **Three specialist community support providers (CSPs) based in Greater Easterhouse:**
 - Connect Community Trust Community Trust
 - FARE Scotland
 - Easthall Residents Association.
- **The local churches**, including Greyfriars Parish Church, Ruchazie Parish Church and St Judes.
- **Other charities** that provided support in the community, including the new Ruchazie Pantry, Urban Fox, and East End Flat Pack Meals.
- **Volunteers**, who were a driving force in the pandemic effort of the three CSPs and the churches. In addition, many residents took part in informal volunteering activities.

Strong local partnerships defined the community pandemic relief effort. While the focus of delivering support was at the neighbourhood level, several key activities were planned and managed at Greater Easterhouse level and in some cases across the wider east end of Glasgow.

A new third sector partnership, the East End Coronavirus Voluntary Action Group, was formed with Connect Community Trust and FARE Scotland as lead partners. The Group mobilised rapidly in March 2020 and played a continuing role during the pandemic. Who did what depended on the strengths and resources of each partner. For example:

- The **housing providers** used their welfare rights services to maximise residents' incomes by c £1.6 million, more than double the external funding received for the whole pandemic relief effort. Their role in identifying people in need and then connecting them with the right services was also critical.
- The **community service providers** led on fundraising and delivering essential services at scale. This included a major operation to provide food and other essentials to residents who were in need, and a range of wellbeing activities and services, often based on physical activity and getting people out of their houses to socialise with others at times when it was safe to do this.

The community partners recorded more than 9,100 instances of household support being provided in 2020/21, as summarised below alongside details of funding and costs.

Type of Help	Number of Households Helped*	Estimated Total Cost/ Spend	External Funding	Own resources	Financial Gains for Residents (Welfare Rights)
Food & Other Essentials	3,067	£377,535	£337,469	£39,156	
Health & Wellbeing	1,914	£157,252	£138,252	£10,270	
Help With Financial Matters	2,427	£67,109	£64,998	£159,803	£1,633,802
Help With Digital Access	508	£99,282	£96,482	£2,050	
Other Help	1,318	£93,004	£61,394	£31,430	
Grand Total**	9,116	£794,182	£698,595	£242,709	£1,633,802
<p>* Some households received help more than once or on a continuing basis.</p> <p>** Outcomes and costs shown do not include one of the large community support providers which could not provide statistics for Greater Easterhouse only, because its funding awards and programme management systems related to larger spatial areas.</p>					

All of the community organisations we spoke to felt that the funding they received – for example, from the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council (GCC), the Lottery and charitable trusts - had been sufficient to do the things that were needed within their communities.

The Role and Impact of External Organisations

There was widespread appreciation among community organisations for the **Scottish Government** making pandemic relief funding available quickly and with a minimum of bureaucracy.

Glasgow City Council was asked to provide information about its service provision in Greater Easterhouse during the pandemic but did not do so. There was general concern among residents and local organisations about a lack of GCC visibility and action in local communities, the accessibility of core GCC services, and a lack of responsiveness to deterioration in local neighbourhood environmental conditions.

The steering groups for Greater Easterhouse’s two Thriving Places initiatives did not meet at all after late 2019. With temporary adaptations to remit and membership and online meetings, the steering groups could have been a useful vehicle for communication and co-ordination across the statutory, third and community sectors during a time of great crisis in communities. There was no other vehicle for addressing this.

Recovery from Covid in Greater Easterhouse

The pandemic has shown that with relatively small amounts of public funding, community organisations have been trusted sources of help for people facing crisis and often with nowhere else to turn. Continuation of Scottish Government funding of relief services is essential in our most fragile communities as **seemingly small interventions matter greatly** when people are experiencing poverty or are struggling to cope with difficult circumstances.

In relation to Covid recovery, there are three major areas where action is urgently needed. These are **poverty, jobs, and health inequality**. EHRA will be calling on political leaders and statutory bodies to work with community representatives and organisations to rapidly develop inclusive plans to address these areas, as well as a dedicated Covid Recovery Plan for Greater Easterhouse.

These are all areas where the Council and public bodies will have lead responsibility but working with community organisations will improve their reach and in some areas of work community organisations can do more to contribute to service planning and delivery.

The Scottish Government has stated that Covid recovery is about **building a fairer society** as well as emerging from a period of crisis. This is welcome, as Covid shone a light on the urgent need to address the place-based poverty and inequality found in Scotland's poorest communities.

Translating this aspiration into rapid action and results on the ground is essential. But the reality is that there is **no integrated place-based policy, financial and delivery framework to support this, either at national or city levels**. Holistic approaches have been replaced by piecemeal efforts funded by discretionary grant schemes, with multiple challenge funding pots and a presumption that community planning will do the job. For example, the output from GCC's Social Recovery Taskforce will be "high level recommendations" to the citywide Community Planning Partnership. Bigger thinking is needed to make a real difference in Scotland's poorest communities.

Scottish Government statements on **community empowerment, placemaking and local democracy** have the potential to create a different and better set of tools for addressing Covid recovery, poverty and inequality in places like Greater Easterhouse. However, what is currently on the table lacks ambition (proposals on community empowerment), clarity and urgency (local democracy) and common sense (an approach to placemaking that focuses overwhelmingly on the physical and built environment, but not how to address co-existing poverty and social inequality). More practical bite is needed in all of these areas where GCC has the capacity to act independently of the Scottish Government if it is minded to do so.

The Scottish Government channelled relief funding through **Community Anchor Organisations (CAOs)** which in Greater Easterhouse are place-based, community-controlled organisations. The role of CAOs needs the full-blooded support of both levels of government in future, so that the community sector can continue to develop its role in communities needing more intensive support. Strong, appropriately funded CAOs could help make community empowerment a reality, where communities get to decide what will best meet local needs and work alongside trusted local organisations that are capable of translating these decisions into tangible activities and results.

The views expressed by national and city politicians are often promising, for example:

Communities are best placed to identify and deliver solutions that meet their needs. Community led organisations are vital to creating, empowering and sustaining resilient communities.⁵

Much more of this type of thinking will be needed to achieve a fair and sustainable recovery in Greater Easterhouse, but we are a long way from it being realised in practice.

⁵ Report on the Glasgow Communities Fund to GCC City Administration Committee by the City Convener for Community Empowerment, Equalities and Human Rights, 7 September 2020