

## Members' Library Service Request Form

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| Date of Document          | 18/10/21   |
| Originator                | Paolo Vestri   |
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| Document Title            | Report on the Consultation on the Draft Poverty Plan 2021-2023 |

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| Date          | 19/10/21            |

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**REPORT TO:** Members' Library Service

**MEETING DATE:**

**BY:** Executive Director for Place

**SUBJECT:** Report on Consultation on the Draft Poverty Plan  
2021-2023

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide elected members with the results of the consultation on the draft Poverty Plan 2021-2023.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The online consultation on the draft Poverty Plan 2021-2023 went live on 8<sup>th</sup> August and concluded on 26<sup>th</sup> September. The consultation was publicised on the home page of the Council website, through a press release and social media content and via emails sent to a wide range of stakeholders including Community Councils, Area Partnerships, Tenants and Residents Associations, members of Volunteer Centre East Lothian (VCEL), the East Lothian Friendly Food Network, the East Lothian Financial Inclusion Network (including Citizen's Advice Bureaux), Elected Members and MSPs. The draft Plan consultation was also the subject of two articles in the East Lothian Courier.

- 3.2 The draft Plan was on the agenda of partnership and network group meetings in August and September including:

- East Lothian Partnership Governance Group
- Children's Strategic Partnership
- Community Justice Partnership
- Connected Economy Group

- Volunteer Centre East Lothian (VCEL) Health & Social Care Forum
- Dunbar and East Linton Area Partnership
- East Lothian Friendly Food Network
- East Lothian Financial Inclusion Network
- East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel Executive
- Communities Recovery and Renewal Group.

3.3 Around 30 individuals and six organisations responded to the on-line survey. Organisations took the opportunity to comment on the draft Plan at the meetings listed above. In addition, the views of people with lived experience including care experienced young people and people attending lunch clubs organised by the Pennypit Trust were recorded and presented as evidence to the consultation.

### **Summary of outcome of the consultation**

3.4 The results from the on-line survey and the partnership and network meetings that discussed the draft Plan showed overwhelming support for the outcomes and proposed actions.

3.5 The consultation showed that there is growing concern at the impact that the COVID pandemic has had on poverty in East Lothian, with growing demand for support from Food Banks and Pantries and other community based support organisations. The interventions by the Scottish Government, including the increase in provision of Free School Meals, the 'hardship' payments, and Self-Isolation Support Grants, the UK Government's Furlough scheme, £20 per week boost to Universal Credit, and local community interventions supported by the council have all played a massive part in supporting people through the last 18 months. However, the rise in unemployment and Universal Credit claimants, the ending of Furlough, the withdrawal of the £20 Universal Credit supplement and the rise in food and fuel prices are all contributing to increases in poverty levels and the fear that poverty will continue to rise over the next period.

3.6 The final version of the Poverty Plan has been amended to take account of the responses to the consultation. The amendments include:

- Slightly amended wording for two of the outcomes
- Clarification that the Plan includes the Child Poverty Plan including the addition of the drivers of Child Poverty, and identification of around 20 actions that are specifically aimed at tackling and mitigating the impact of child poverty
- Clarification that the Plan is based on early intervention and prevention
- The addition of quotes from people with lived experience to show the impact of poverty on people's lives and reflect the need for urgent and concerted action

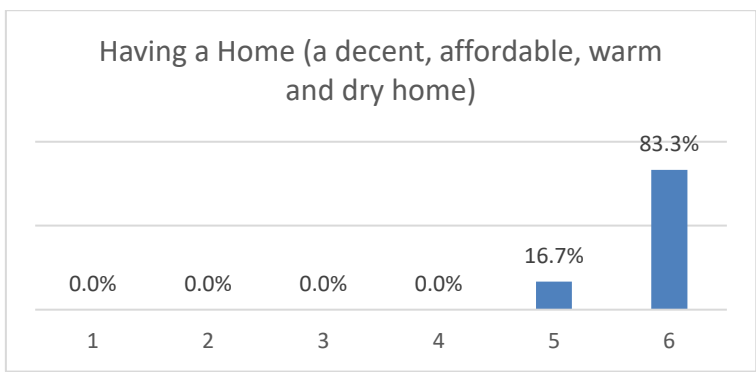
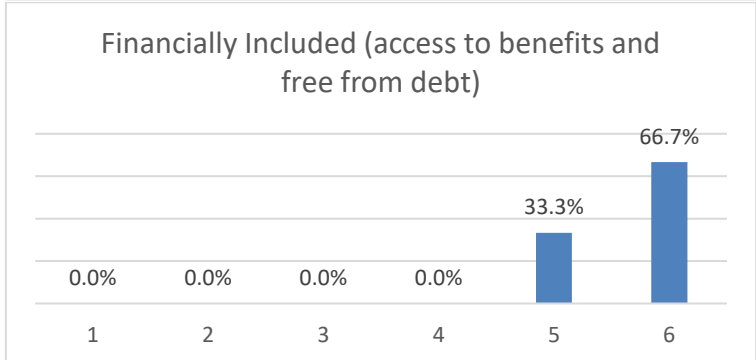
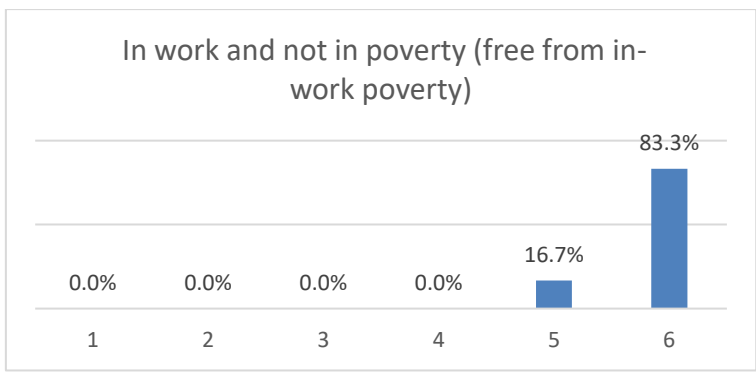
- Amendments to the Action Plan; several actions being moved to a different Outcome, and the addition of some specific actions.

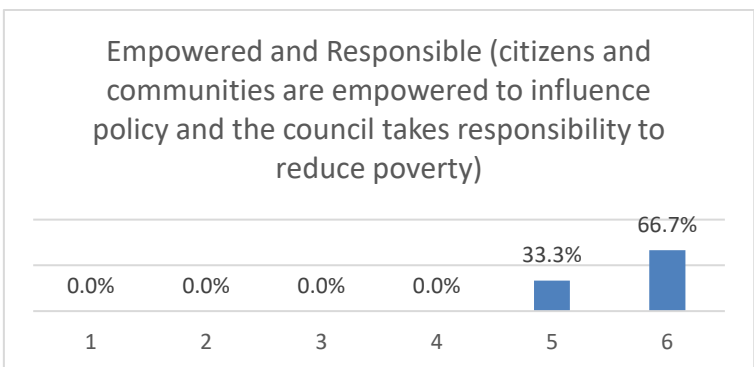
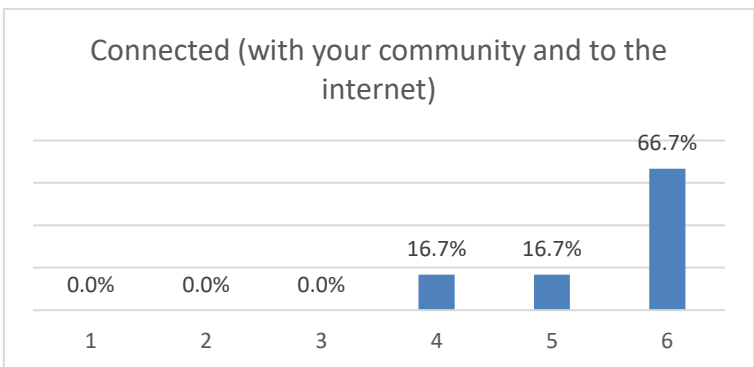
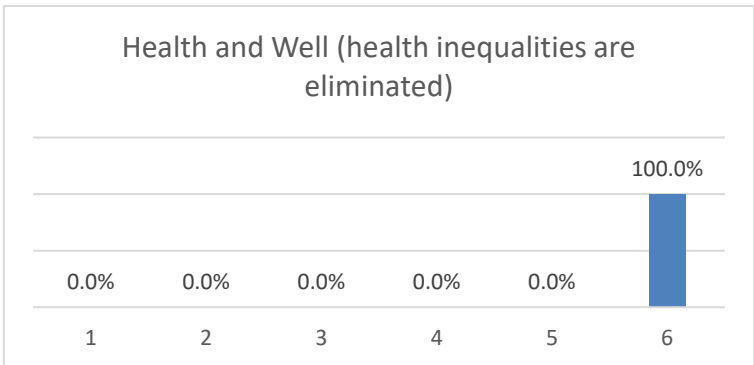
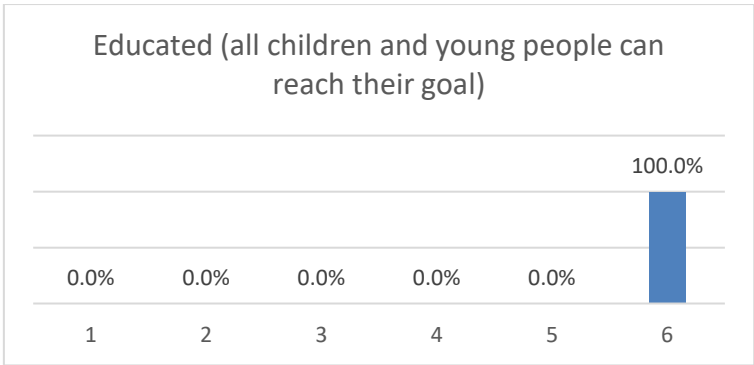
**Results of Quantitative questions in the online survey**

**Responses from organisations**

3.7 The following graphs show that all the organisations that responded to the survey gave all seven outcomes a positivity score of either 6 or 5, with the exception of Outcome 6: Connected, which had a slightly lower positive rating. The comment on this outcome suggested that this was because of uncertainty about the meaning of the outcome rather than lack of support.

***On a scale of 1 – 6 (where 1 = not at all, and 6 = very important) how would you rate the importance of the 7 themes/ outcomes of the Draft Poverty Plan?***





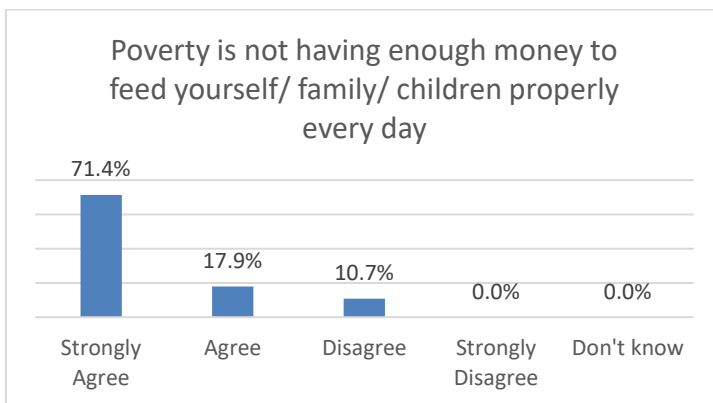
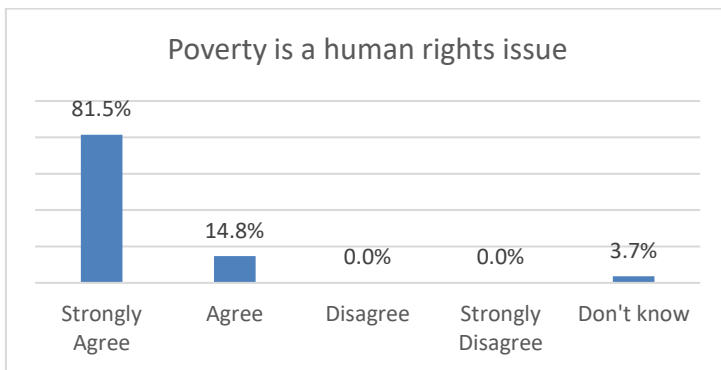
3.8 Almost all the organisations that responded to the survey agreed that all the actions detailed for each of the outcomes are needed, but several of them made suggestions for how actions could be developed or suggested additional actions. (see Appendix 1)

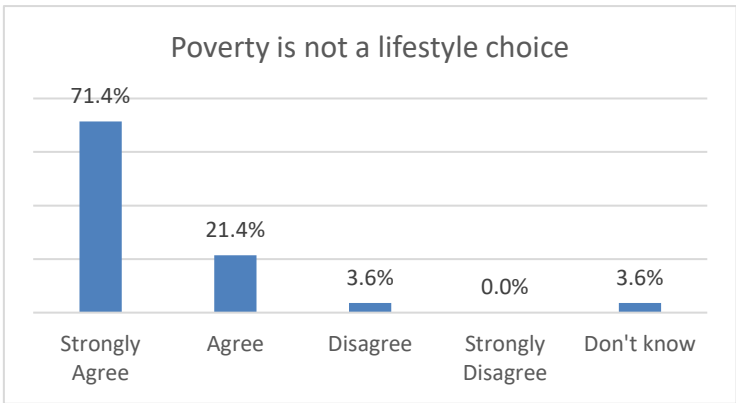
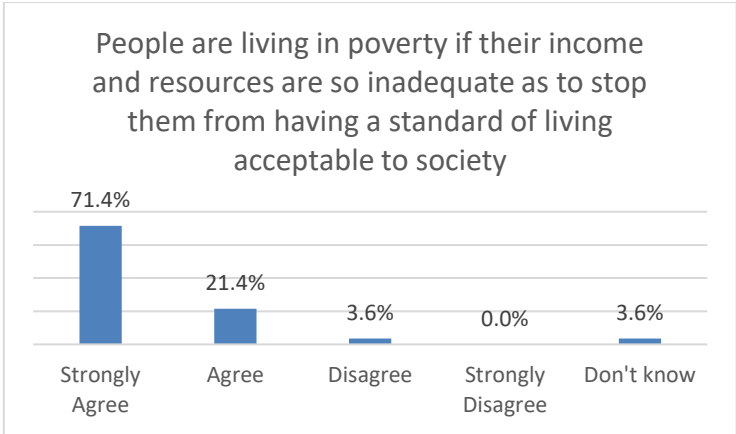
### **Responses from Individuals**

3.9 Just over half of the 30 individual respondents stated they are managing very well or quite well financially whilst only one in five said they are not managing well or are in financial difficulty. None of the respondents were unemployed, working part-time or on zero hours contracts. Just over a quarter were retired.

3.10 Individuals were asked to provide their views about what Poverty means by agreeing or disagreeing to various statements. As the following graphs show there was overwhelming agreement that:

- Poverty is a Human rights issue
- Poverty is not having enough money to feed yourself/ family/ children properly every day
- People are living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to stop them from having a standard of living acceptable to society
- Poverty is not a lifestyle choice.



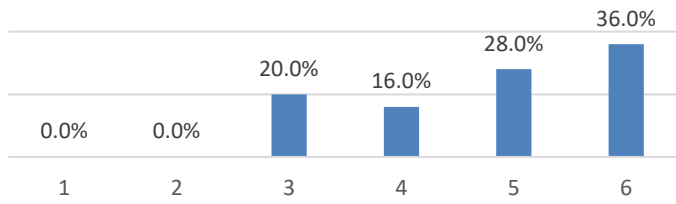


3.11 Individual respondents were asked a series of statement to show how they measure standard of living. As is shown in the graphs below, the order of importance give to the various options, from most to least important was:

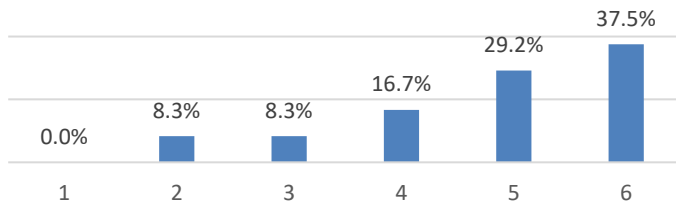
- Enough money to heat a home to ensure it is not cold during the winter months
- A Bank Account
- Access to £250 to cover an unexpected, but necessary expense
- Enough bedrooms in the house for every child aged 10 or older of different sex to have their own bedroom
- Access to a computer or laptop and broadband to get onto the internet
- Enough money to keep a home in a decent state of decoration
- Enough money to save regularly (at least £20 per week) to meet unexpected, but necessary expenses
- A family holiday of at least one week a year
- Home contents insurance
- A mobile phone
- Money to give every child (over 10 years old) pocket money of £5 per week

***On a scale of 1-6 how important do you think the following are in measuring whether someone has an adequate standard of living (1 = not important at all, and 6 = essential).***

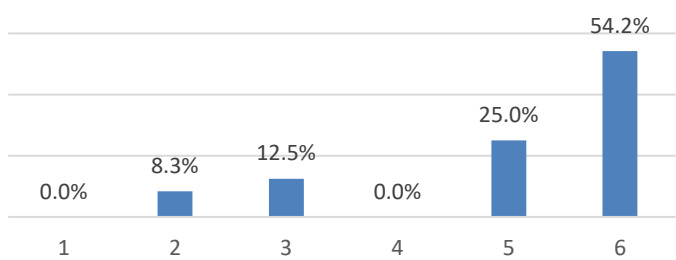
Poverty scale - 1. Enough money to save regularly (at least £20 per week) to meet unexpected, but necessary expenses



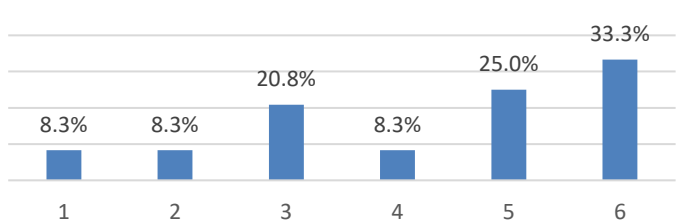
Poverty scale - 2. Enough money to keep a home in a decent state of decoration



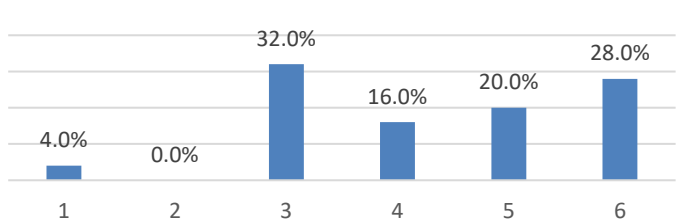
Poverty scale 3. A Bank Account



Poverty scale - 4. Home contents insurance

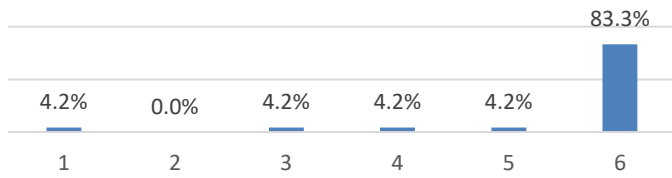


Poverty scale - 5. A mobile phone

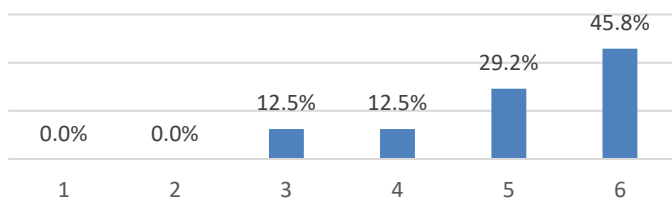




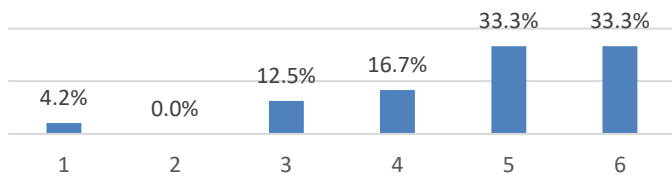
Poverty scale 6 -. Enough money to heat a home to ensure it is not cold during the winter months



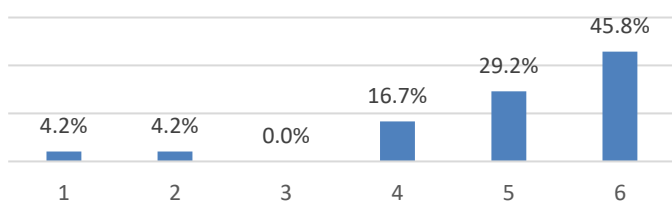
Poverty scale - 7. Access to £250 to cover an unexpected, but necessary expense

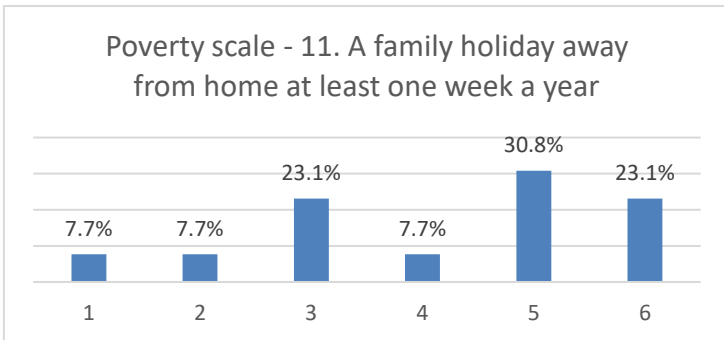
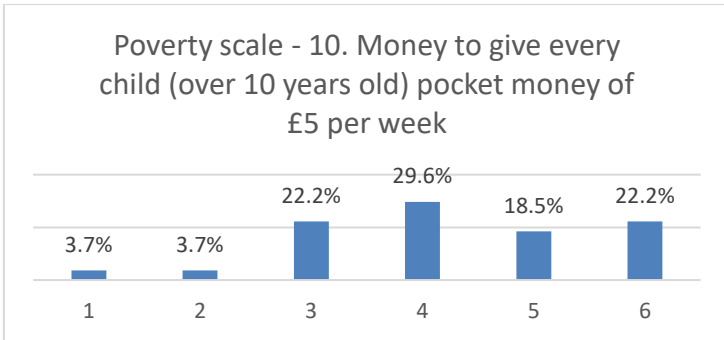


Poverty scale - 8. Access to a computer or laptop and broadband to get onto the internet



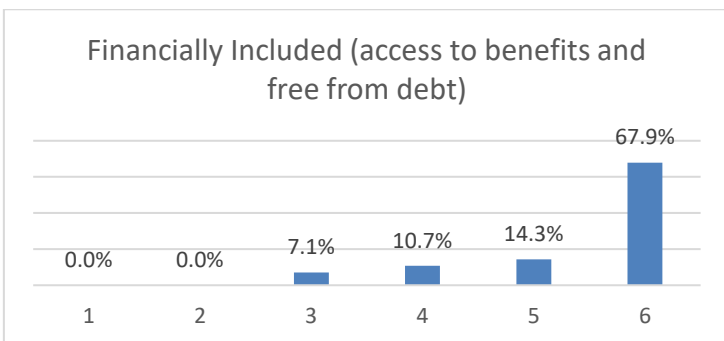
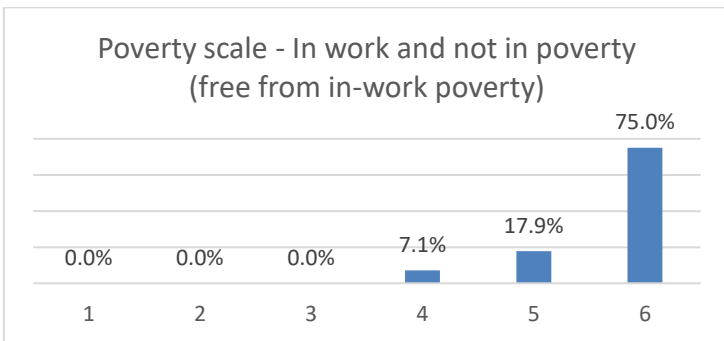
Poverty scale - 9. Enough bedrooms in the house for every child aged 10 or older of different sex to have their own bedroom

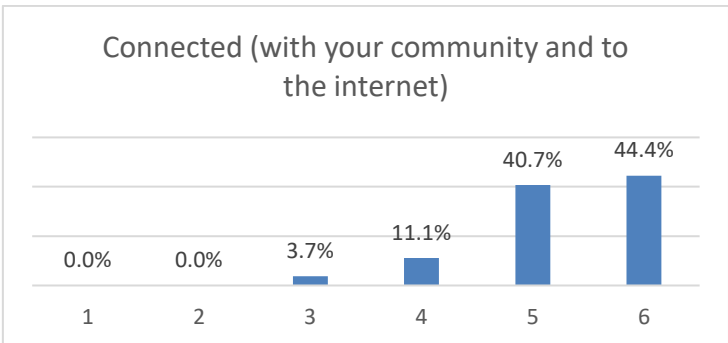
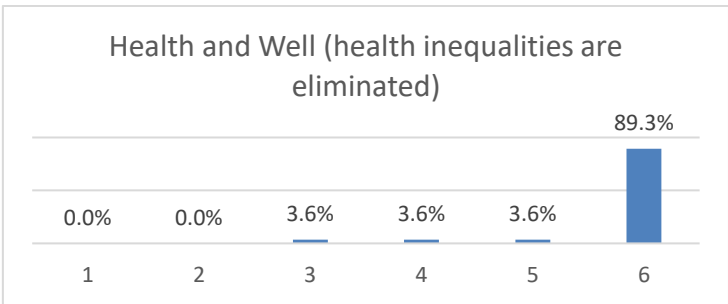
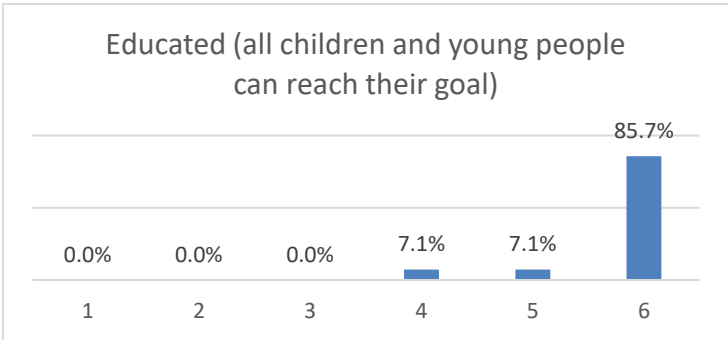
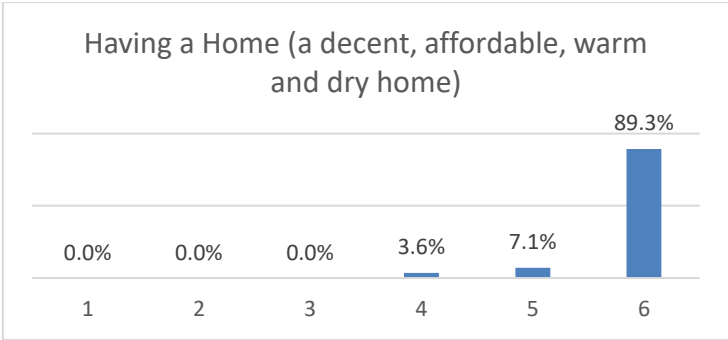


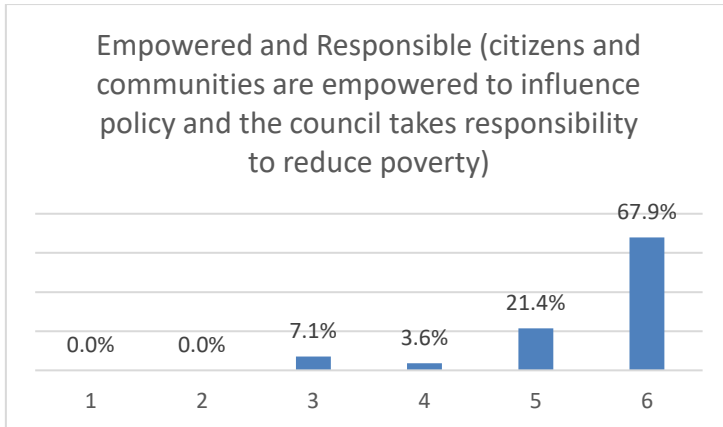


3.12 The following graphs show that at least 80% of the individuals who responded to the survey gave all seven outcomes in the draft Poverty Plan a positivity score of 5 or 6.

***On a scale of 1 – 6 (where 1 = not at all, and 6 = very important) how would you rate the importance of the 7 themes/ outcomes of the Draft Poverty Plan?***







3.13 A large majority of the individuals that responded to the survey agreed that all the actions detailed for each of the outcomes are needed. All the comments made in the actions are provided in Appendix 2.

### **Views of people with Lived Experience**

3.14 The consultation sought the views of people with lived experience of poverty. Several organisations carried out exercises to get the views of people with lived experience of poverty; covering issues such as:

- What does poverty mean to you?
- What do you think is the most important thing to be done to reduce poverty?
- What do you think is important to have for a decent standard of living?
- What was your experience of having to seek help with food?
- Do you think the Council or any other public body could do more to reduce poverty and inequality in East Lothian?

3.15 The detailed comments from clients of Pennypit Trust and Care Experienced Young People from the Champs Board are provided in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4. Some of the quotes provided by people with lived experience have been used in the Poverty Plan to provide a powerful testimony about what poverty means for care experienced young people and people who have to rely on Food Banks and other emergency food and meal provision.

3.16 The evidence from people with lived experience highlights the hard choices faced by people in poverty; that circumstances outwith their control are the causes of poverty; and shows the growing concern about the loss of the £20 boost to Universal Credit and continued financial hardship from unemployment and the higher cost of living. Their evidence re-enforces the need for concerted action by UK and Scottish Governments, the Council and its partners and the community to break the cycle of poverty.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The results of the consultation on the draft Poverty Plan have helped inform the final version of the Plan which has been submitted to Council for approval.

#### **5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial – none.  
6.2 Personnel – none.  
6.3 Other – none.

#### **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 None

Appendix 1: Comments submitted by Organisations

Appendix 2: Comments from Individuals

Appendix 3: Comments from Pennypit Trust clients

Appendix 4: Comments from Care Experienced Young people

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|----------------------|--|
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| <b>DESIGNATION</b>   | Service Manager Policy, Improvement & Partnerships |
| <b>CONTACT INFO</b>  | pvestri@eastlothian.gov.uk                         |
| <b>DATE</b>          | 18 <sup>th</sup> October 2021                      |

## Appendix 1: Comments submitted by Organisations

### East Lothian Foodbank

From the perspective/ experience of our organisation, poverty has increased a lot since March 2020.

Low income is cited as the predominant reason for referral to our foodbank. If we assume that "low income" is an indication of poverty our stats show that this has increased from 42% (Jan to August 2020) to 58% for the same period this year (Jan - August 2021)

Suggested amendments to outcomes and actions:

1.2: source of definition of Fair Wages and Fair Employment would be useful

1.5: the third sector has a lot to offer in Developing Scotland Young (DYP) Workforce group

1.5: suggest East Lothian Works actively engages with third sector to promote Kickstart and other initiative

2.2: it would be good to see specific proactive action detailed for 2021-23 that will be taken to link specific advice to those facing financial hardship.

2.3: increase links between council and 3rd sector organisations to ensure they can support uptake of new Scottish security benefits.

2.2 & 2.3: there is no specific mention of the role of the Scottish Welfare Fund in delivering the plan and promoting and improving referral pathways to ensure people are financially included. What will their role be in delivering the plan?

2.5: this Objective specifically mentions tackling food poverty. There is no specific action mentioned here which deals with tackling the cause of food poverty – namely low income. *{Response – Outcome 1 and the actions under this outcome all relate to reducing unemployment and reducing in-work poverty; Action 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4 all relate to income maximisation for people who have to rely on benefits}*

We would like to see promotion of “cash first” solutions that promote dignity and will eliminate the need for emergency food. Extensive provision of emergency food is a response to dealing with hunger caused by poverty but it doesn’t offer a long term solution to eliminating poverty.

We anticipate a challenging winter. Low income is the most common reason as the reason for accessing crisis food provision at East Lothian Foodbank. With the £20 cut to Universal Credit, the furlough scheme coming to an end, cold winter months upon us and rising energy costs, we anticipate many more people will find themselves without enough money to cover the essentials like food and heating bills and will be forced to access foodbanks.

We undertook telephone surveys of service users relating to this consultation. Our service users are as concerned as we are about what lies ahead. One service user commented on the UC cut: *“I’m terrified how that’s going to affect me and my family - £20 is a fortune to someone like me”*

When asked what is essential to having an adequate standard of living? Responses included *“money to feed your family”* *“just enough money to keep the home”*

Whilst only a small survey this indicates a need for greater access to cash first solutions and access to income maximisation and debt management support to be widely available.

2.5: Although we want to move away from emergency food we need to ensure all ELC/ organisations are aware of the provisions available (through Friendly Food Network) and how to access them – audit of services and a guide provided. ELFB has started to collate this information to improve signposting to our service users of support services in East Lothian.

2.5: Budgeting skills. Delivering this from school age upwards would be helpful and could form part of the proactive solutions in the plan.

3.2: define SHORE acronym within the body of the plan for clarity to those who aren’t familiar with this.

3.4: whilst very positive actions, generally more information on the details would be helpful.

3.6: Tenant Participation seems to sit better under Empowered and Responsible theme.

4.1: is there any support available to access subsidised school uniform that can be added as an action here?

4.7: suggest changing the reference to a “Poverty Champion” to something more positive.

6: an action to tackle drug misuse and support drug users in East Lothian via the support agencies working in the area.

6.2: ELFB via Trussell Trust is piloting a scheme where we can provide a small number of Vodafone prepaid SIMs valid for 6 months to those with an identified need.

6.4: Promote the new NEC Young Person Free Bus Travel scheme for under 22.

There are a number of areas where the foodbank can play a role including the following objectives. ELFB

- Are an accredited living wage employer and are encouraging other organisations within the community to sign up for this or if they're not able to do so immediately, start to plan for how they can achieve this.
- Are in touch with East Lothian Works to explore how we can work with young people in the form of a foundation or modern apprenticeship and a programme of work experience.
- Can support the volunteering strategy for East Lothian.
- Are exploring opportunities to set up an income maximisation service.
- Could potentially be a vehicle to deliver cash grants to service users.
- Are an active member as well as a funder for the East Lothian Food Friendly Network and partner organisations.
- Are currently undertaking a mapping exercise of local crisis food provision and support.
- Operate throughout the county and are part of a national network. We are well placed to sit on working groups at a strategic level in the county to help tackle the underlying causes of food poverty.
- Are engaging with our service users about ongoing service developments so can positively input into shaping services to tackle poverty.
- Could include education as part of our income maximisation service
- Host a help yourself box of period products at our premises which anyone can access.
- Are supporting school breakfast clubs to tackle morning hunger and also are proactively reaching out to other schools to find out if they would benefit from this form of support.
- Continually work towards ensuring our parcels are nutritionally valuable as possible including fresh produce and healthy recipes to accompany contents.
- via Trussell Trust is partnering with Vodafone on a scheme where we can provide a small number of pre paid SIMs valid for 6 months to those with an identified need.

The outcome related to poverty is not definitive. A statement to say poverty in East Lothian will be reduced would be much more positive and pro-active and in line with the strength of conviction given to the other outcomes listed.

**A children's charity** *(Agreed that response can be published but not to identify the organisation)*

From our perspective poverty has increased slightly in the last 18 months.

Poverty is always present for our families. We tend to see peaks where debt rises e.g. early new year after families have over spent. We are seeing several food bank referrals for our families. We also offer healthy eating/weaning packs as part of the holistic and pregnancy support.

Many of the families have been supported with meeting basic needs e.g. food, fuel and clothing over the past 12 months. Our Fundraising Manager supported



these efforts in applying for grants. We see a direct correlation to the decline in parental mental health.

Healthy family functioning benefits every body - parents, kind carers, children, young people. This means enough food on the table, enough money to budget with, good budgeting and planning skills, improved sleep (as benefits and debt managed), little impact on mental health, as financially buoyant, less cost related to caring roles, as reduced health inequalities. Seeing individuals as living in families (rather than siloed working) is beneficial.

The intensive family support might better reflect the many third sector providers that offer support to East Lothian families affected by poverty in this way, perhaps a strategic link with the Volunteer Centre East Lothian Children, Young People and Families Forum would broaden this outcome/action out?

We particularly welcome the support to parents.

An outreach service could be provided to families affected by poverty to provide income maximisation and skills development - for those who have more complex needs e.g. poor mental health, substance use, domestic abuse, who often find it harder to access services. This will have benefits for the whole family e.g. increase income, improve physical and mental health, greater emotional availability for children.

Making the link between income maximisation, improved living conditions and family functioning would be ideal. Once this evidence is gathered - the impact on mental health, parents emotional availability and the impact on children (and their distress manifest in their behaviour) becomes very clear. This all needs to be strengths and asset based.

A strategic link with the children, young people and families VCEL group - as there are many third sector providers referenced here, but many others who regularly help families maximise income, improve living conditions.

Making the assumption that all families can access a universal services is not necessarily the case, as many are incredibly isolated, feel stigma and shame, as well as reporting feeling judged and 'othered' by some professionals. (See recent National Child Protection Guidance).

Work on an outreach basis with children, young people and families to prevent homelessness by provision of whole family support, alongside conflict resolution, income maximisation and advocacy. Increase awareness and skill of the workforce (universal and targeted) to identify risk factors and protective factors early and help support vulnerable individuals and groups, to prevent homelessness.

We particularly welcome the focus on raising attainment and evaluating the impact of this policy locally. The inclusion and family support team is very welcome. It would be good to hear more about this?

Young carers (those affected by parental substance use for example) are still being missed, where poverty intersects with parental trauma and distress. Children in our experience end up carrying a lot of shame and are fearful of talking to 'safe' adults. GIRFEC helps to a degree, but it does feel like they would benefit from a dedicated resource.

The recent PEF framework did not seem to identify this (and it may not be a priority which we fully appreciate), but parents do tell us their parenting identity, building on their strengths, emotional and practical support, helping them take back control of their lives, while putting in routines e.g. bedtime, food, home learning, as well modelling attuned care are all important in helping children to engage with education. As well as contacting schools, support to attend meetings etc. Looking at whole families as a system change could work well for many of these outcomes.

We particularly welcome the connection with social isolation - which inter-generationally impacts hugely on families. Eg if mum cannot leave the house due to fear and social anxiety, as well as shame and stigma, how can children access resources.

The link between adult mental health and poverty is greatly welcomed.

Action 6.1 seems very broad. I am not sure we can comment on this without the detail of what this means.

Travel passes seem important to our families to remain connected and in order to sustain change.

Connected also could include reference to stigma and 'othering' as this is often how families with mental health issues and / or substance use feel disconnected.

The voices of the lived experience is coming through in this document which is helpful. Training and awareness raising is covered, but how this changes practice / take up of support, income maximisation, education and employability could be usefully followed through and tracked.

There is something (perhaps more for us) about connecting with Area Partnerships more, smaller organisations find it more challenging due to capacity so some kind of link between VCEL groups and these perhaps.

The stats in the separate document are helpful, more of these showing long term impact and Social Return on Investment would be useful for third sector to also draw funding in to East Lothian.

What more could be done: making the connection with whole families and the impact of poverty on family functioning to achieve better outcomes (economic, health, social, educational) for all the family is important, this may require systems change to understand a bit better what the impact is across families and how supports can best organised to reach respective family members, e.g.

children, young people, parents, carers, grandparents, kin carers.

There are many sub groups identified in this e.g. carers or disabilities, this runs the risk of those who don't quite meet the criteria falling out with support. Perhaps those on the margins of services could be brought in - no wrong door?

Child care is essential and is picked up in 2 year old places, could these be universal where family support not available (not just vulnerable) as a pilot?

I think there is something about an engagement exercise as we are all remote, it feels like quite a remote strategies, but we appreciate a number of people have worked hard on this.

### **Pennypit Trust**

From our perspective poverty has increased a lot in the last 18 months. We have seen a rising number engaging in all our provisions, especially food provisions, reports from evaluations have shown, furlough, job loss, zero hours contracts and applying to UC and waiting on benefits have contributed to increase in poverty

Do you think the Council or any other public body could do more to reduce poverty and inequality in East Lothian? Yes, provide longer term funding to organisations who tackle poverty

The Pennypit trust would like to continue being part of the working group to support the plan and help those with lived experience to be part of the working group so their own experiences and difficulties can be heard in the hope that we can make positive changes to alleviate poverty and break the cycle.

**A Community Council** *(Agreed that response can be published but not to identify the organisation)*

During lockdown we provided an Email/phone contact for "assistance". e.g. food delivery, pick up for prescriptions, transport to doctor/hospital. A weekly snack lunch was prepared and delivered to 23 residents in the area. A fund was set up for residents who were in need of emergency financial assistance, (funded by the Kirk and personal donations). One resident received finance from the fund.

Poverty increased slightly during the last 18 months. The response time and availability of GP's has caused issues; i.e. no face to face appointments; no home visits, and long waits for an appointment. Not being able to access health professionals along with delayed hospital appointments has been a considerable contribution.

Under the Healthy and Well theme the same standard of provision should be available regardless of where you live in East Lothian.

'Living wage' - this is purely a political statement, based on no real factual information. Dictating national minimum wage is acceptable. Employers must be allowed to dictate their own wage based mostly on what can be afforded.

Period Poverty should be dealt with by controlling the cost of these items in the shops.

The provision of food for morning hunger and free school meals requires to be closely monitored; uptake and wastage. Reviews should be carried out accordingly.

More time will be spent consulting than "doing"!

### **Family Nurse Partnership**

Poverty has increased slightly

There seems to be a greater pressure on housing

Family planning services have been much more difficult to access leading to an increase in unplanned pregnancies. Support services such as Mum and baby groups / volunteers / befrienders all closed in the pandemic leading to increased isolation and less help for people in need

Improving public transport in East Lothian. This is a barrier to many people finding work outside their immediate area, if they do not drive

There is a need to increase places for 2year olds who are eligible for childcare in East Lothian. In Edinburgh, eligible children (parents on benefits, looked after or in Family Nurse Partnership) get a place around 2yrs old. In East Lothian there are significant waiting lists with places not being taken up for several months / up to a year following age 2. This prevents parents finding work and also has the potential to affect child development.

There is a lack of family planning / contraceptive services in East Lothian. The only outreach clinic is in Tranent and was closed during the pandemic and GPs were also difficult to access during this time. More outreach clinics around EL would make contraception more available, less unplanned pregnancies would mean less poverty as parents would be more able to work as well as incurring fewer expenses related to having children.

### **Dunpender Community Council**

In East Linton, we encountered quite a number of cases of families being very short of funds during the early stages of the pandemic. Fortunately, we were able to point them in the direction of different resources mainly in Dunbar. Shortages were: lack of money to take a child to hospital for a family without a car: families trying to manage without school meals (in one case a mother of four had been told to get a bus to Dunbar for food but she had no money for the bus); and lack of funds for pupils requiring uniform and basic kit (pencil cases etc) for starting at Dunbar Grammar in August. Work done by volunteers in Dunbar was excellent and a local minister was helpful at co-ordination.

We observed that as people were at home more, there was an increase in the amount of home improvements being done, but a lack of tradesmen to carry out

skilled work. We wondered if the Council was in a position to encourage young people to take up apprenticeships, perhaps providing bursaries through the East Lothian Educational Trust, to indicate that these jobs are valuable and can increase employment among young people.

We note the withdrawal of the £20 addition to Universal Credit with dismay. Yes this was a temporary move, but it's unreasonable to expect a family which has £20 of extra food one week not to have this the next week. We hope the Scottish Government increases Child Credits which will make up for this.

We also note that the introduction of free bus travel for under 22s will encourage young people on to public transport and make it easier for them to start work before they receive any pay. It might encourage students into Saturday jobs as well.

We have heard from the Crunchy Carrot vegetable shop in Dunbar, a social enterprise, that there is a huge skills gap in cooking food which can be linked to depression and poor mental health issues. Can our schools do more to encourage children to learn to cook, perhaps by inviting someone like Mary Contini to run a series of lessons in say, Musselburgh Grammar school? Could the Council ask the Scottish Govt Education Department to place a higher value on learning to cook?

Finally, could the Council organise some positive events for families? For example, again using the East Lothian Educational Trust or a charitable foundation, acquire some funding to block book some family tickets for Foxlake Water Sports or East Links Family Park so that families could have a day out. Or even ask these organisations to have a Doors Open-type day where local people could go along for free and try things out, and promise them free publicity in Press and TV in return. Many families won't have had even a cheap holiday for two years, and a day out could cheer people up.

## Appendix 2: Comments from individuals

### Is there another theme/ outcome, or other themes/ outcomes you think should be included in the Poverty Plan?

- Making low income families living in expensive private let properties a priority for social housing
- Moves towards universalism in as many areas as possible to save the cost of means testing and the stigma of the poverty label.
- Research into drivers of poverty and aims to reduce those.
- Too many ELC residents in low paid full time employment are worse off financially than those being paid benefits and this needs to be addressed.  
Those in employment, even when it is low paid have to pay rent/council tax, travel to work (bus travel costs in some parts of East Lothian are extortionate) dental treatment and glasses (and serious shortage of NHS dentists so that too many residents have to pay privately). Though opticians advertise less expensive frames for glasses the cost of lenses is very high (reasonable pair of glasses can cost £140)  
School uniforms and meals while children are at school are expensive. Likewise ELC sports facilities all year round are expensive for low paid working families who have to pay full price (families on benefits get for free)  
ELC has increased rents by 5% each year for the last 4 years. How are working people of all ages expected to pay when their pay increase might only be 1% annually? And not only increase in house rents annually but also travel to work, gas and electricity to heat homes.  
Personal allowance before paying tax is very unfair to single people of all ages especially young people who prefer to find employment rather than go to college full time.  
ELC needs to use its Housing Rent Revenue for the benefit of tenants especially those paying full/part rent instead of using it to deal with anti social tenants who harass neighbors and wreck communities. Instead of handing out ASBOs that last for ridiculous amounts of time eg 4 years, ELC should be giving the anti social limited time to behave in an acceptable manner. And evict the anti social where necessary instead of making excuses for them (3000 applicants currently on ELC waiting list for housing, majority of whom would not be anti social)  
ELC should be encouraging companies to come to East Lothian and make jobs available locally, especially quality jobs that pay higher salaries. Part time/seasonal/small family business jobs are useful but do not offer security/pension to employees, and wages are usually just on minimum level.  
As well as reducing poverty ELC needs to concentrate on building a thriving local economy instead of relying on Edinburgh to provide employment where wages are higher.  
In addition there needs to be an independent assessment of ELC expenditure (wasting public money on road signs in gaelic while arguing that residents are living in poverty)  
And an independent assessment of staffing levels and grades at ELC is required.  
At the start of Covid pandemic in 2020 ELC was conspicuous by its absence to do anything constructive to assist residents, it was left to communities to organise things for themselves. Thankfully most communities managed this

- Access to activities, aimed towards well-being, healthy cooking workshops, upcycling and how to fix workshops, tool banks, access to outdoors activities and sports. All of the above helping tackle, health issues, mental health, isolation etc
- You must look more closely at the working poor! Many families work & work hard not just one job but 2 & can't claim any help or access support
- Access to family support services
- Free access to lifelong learning
- Strong community-based support for refugees and asylum seekers so that they are 'included' in all the ways outlined above
- Those parents who work exceptionally hard and still don't earn a decent wage and so almost worse off than those on benefits. An understanding that those in private housing may not be well off either - they may have inherited the house but their income makes it difficult to afford to run it and to support their children, heat it and put food on the table - this needs to be assessed and people like this supported too. In terms of pensioners, poverty is very real to them too. Often living by themselves - paying the bills by themselves that are manageable when there was two of them but not on a single pension - and if a woman, a poor one at that. Removal of the TV licence was awful for many pensioners and took away the only company some had from get that connection with life. This needs to be re-instated - even if based on pension.
- There doesn't seem to be much help for people with poor health and/or disabilities. I am 60, with various health issues. Sometimes I can't even cook a basic meal, dishes can lie in the sink for days. My house hasn't been decorated since I moved in this house 15 years ago. Apart from hospital, I haven't spent a night away from home in the same period. I can't afford to. There are times I really need help with basic tasks, but it isn't available for short periods. Struggling through and playing catch up only makes things worse. I feel like I am fighting a losing battle, just trying to do basic housework while things slowly deteriorate even further.
- Universal credits are being stopped and this will make some people poorer and food banks busier. Maybe if the Westminster government stopped squandering tax payers money whilst lining their own pockets everyone would be better off.
- Opportunities for all children to take part in sport/music/art/drama out with the school setting

**Are there any other action(s) you think should be included in the Plan under outcome 1?**

- Legal requirement that employers pay fair wages and pension contributions or risk immediate penalty applied. Maybe three counts and they are 'outed'
- Seek government to make automatic Employer responsibility to pay fair wage and pension contribution with penalties for repeatedly failing to do so.

- Facilities for low paid working residents that match those for non working residents (reduced costs for essentials like dentistry/opticians, entry to ELC sports and leisure facilities, free access to children's school holiday play schemes)
- ELC should be working with Scottish Government to provide reasonably priced bus transport and not just free transport for under 19s/over 60s. East Lothian residents dependent on East Coast buses have to pay fares that are double the price of fares on Lothian Buses (yet it is all one company)
- Not sure this is relevant but I do feel strongly that employers and businesses with shareholders should be required by law to pay an adequate living wage so that no one in work requires additional state benefits. One example is the giant super market chains: why should the tax payer effectively increase the dividend paid to shareholders by enabling employers to pay low wages to staff that the state then 'tops up'?
- I don't think you give enough weight to community wealth building. For example 20% of the budget of the Edinburgh and SE Scotland City Deal should go towards this, thus strong local economy not so much dependent on globalism and trickle down economics.

**Outcome 2: Financially Included (access to benefits and free from debt).  
The Draft Poverty Plan has 8 actions under this outcome: 2.1 – 2.8. Do you think all of these actions are needed?**

2.8 should be rewritten: Period products for the WOMEN and GIRLS who need them. It is only women and girls who need period products only (however they chose to identify). The council should not presume to erase language particular to the female 'sex' especially when issues of poverty are known to be driven by the protected characteristic of 'sex'. Perceived inclusion in this way only serves to water down the issues facing both females and gender reassigned people.

**Are there any other action(s) you think should be included in the Plan under outcome 2?**

- Under 2.5 be clear that there will be some differences between men and women in the causes of food poverty/insecurity. Take note of and address both the issues affecting men and the issues affecting women.
- Emphasis on employer's responsibilities.
- Short term help such as issuing blue badges for temporary periods to people who have recently had operations and or other issues who need it.



**Outcome 3: Having a Home (a decent, affordable, warm and dry home).The Draft Poverty Plan has 7 actions under this outcome: 3.1 – 3.7. Do you think all of these actions are needed? - If you answered No, which one(s)?**

- Council should have sufficient own tradespeople to address house issues when they arise; increase duty of care; upgrade properties swiftly and safely with tenants health, access in mind; avoid long waits for eg ramps, damp, cold issues; address antisocial behaviours, reward excellent tenants; legally access unused private property using empty housing laws.
- Homes have got to be affordable. With annual rent increases of 5% houses owned by ELC are rapidly becoming unaffordable to low paid working people (families/ singles/ couples. Working tenants living in new build so called affordable homes and those owned by ELHA are looking for transfers because of the high rents of these properties. Every working person has a right to 2 weeks holiday every year but cannot afford it because of the high cost of rents. We should not have a society where low paid working people cannot afford a holiday while those who do not work and get paid benefits manage to have holidays (and many of those getting paid benefits are not disabled but choose not to work)
- I think you have misconceived what 'affordable housing' is - it has a specific definition. I reckon very few people in 'affordable housing' are in poverty. Mainly by building and refurbishing council housing will you tackle the problem. Affordable housing is for another income/asset group.

**Are there any other action(s) you think should be included in the Plan under outcome 3?**

- Giving low income families living in expensive private lets more priority for social housing
- Supporting affordable homes of all sizes that are big enough to accommodate families. High rents compared with mortgages is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Council should rent private properties not being used. Council should build more decent homes and upgrade all properties asap employing own tradespeople. Too many stories of people living under councils in unsuitable accommodation. Tenants should be given shorter terms to turn around unsociable behaviours etc and good tenants rewarded.
- You need to specifically target energy performance retro fitting the housing of those in fuel poverty.

**Outcome 4: Educated (all children and young people can reach their goal). The Draft Poverty Plan has 8 actions under this outcome: 4.1 – 4.8. Do you think all of these actions are needed?**

- It is important that all children achieve to the best of their ability. Education needs to be concentrated on equipping them for the best possible outcome when they leave school. That means ensuring that they are literate and numerate, have IT skills and are socially competent. Secondary schools need to concentrate on education for a career. Currently too much of the secondary education focuses on subjects like religious and social studies, support for pupils who would be more efficiently supported by social workers. Every pupil moving from primary to secondary education should be at an acceptable level of literacy and numeracy. Primary schools need to ensure this is the case.
- Free learn to do workshops for kids, crafts /upcycling/ fixing /cooking
- Access to internet and equipment to keep up with studies is essential
- I doubt if many young people have a realistic goal. Rather they gain from a well rounded education and grounding in the 3 r's.

**Are there any other action(s) you think should be included in the Plan under outcome 4?**

- 4.1 'Poverty, Equality and Inclusion Toolkit' - Poverty should not be conflated with other issues of equalities. This toolkit must have a clear focus on the issues and drivers of poverty already discussed - food, finance and homes in particular.
- 4.2 Also being aware of the SQA algorithm that openly discriminated against young people on free school meals
- Employ many more qualified tutors and support workers.
- Universities should be required to reinstate their lifelong learning departments. In order to continue to benefit from the fees paid by the Scottish government on behalf of students, universities should be obliged in law to offer classes and courses with equivalent status to degree programmes, adapted to learners who do not initially meet full university entrance requirements. Funding was withdrawn from the former 'extra mural classes' in the 1990s & emphasis on funding "research" reduced the status of ALL teaching and learning,. This "research" was frequently an individual academic pursuing private interests. I worked in universities for over 30 years and watched them turn from institutions based on scholarship, teaching and learning to businesses competing with one another for research funding. It's a sophisticated con trick and it has damaged Scotland's education right down to primary school level. An independent Scotland needs to fix it and needs to have in charge of fixing it someone dedicated to the education of the whole of society. It's a massively powerful lever for lifting people out of poverty.

**Are there any other action(s) you think should be included in the Plan under Outcome 5 (Healthy and Well)?**

- The immediate removal of Gender Identity Ideology from our schools. Gender Identity Ideology has been imposed in our schools over the last few years. The belief that one has an innate gender identity that may be different to one's birth sex along with a 'born in the wrong body' narrative has resulted in confusion for the children and the creation of 'trans kids'. This is a belief system not based in science and has not been openly discussed in the wider community and has potentially affected the mental health of all children. Teachers have been asked to affirm pupils 'gender identity' often without parents' knowledge further compounding the issue. Psychological help has not been on offer. School's guidance has been shown to misrepresent the law and put girls in danger. Shirley Anne Somerville MSP and minister in the Scottish Government said this guidance would be replaced in 2019, but this has not happened. I am a teacher in a high school and can testify to all of this first hand.
- Move faster and employ more trained people who act on needs rather than fill in loads of paperwork.
- Build trust by proving the experienced Re being heard and that there will be no negative outcomes in their lives for voicing their views. Employ more trained workers to seek these views. Publicise the views anonymously.
- Decent benefits, but that's not up to you.
- You need to convince politicians that we need clean air and access to green spaces, and active travel to school/work. Attempts to get people out of cars are a sham and it impacts people who do not have cars. During the hungry 1930's people in mass were prepared to get arrested to keep rights of way open - fresh air and nature are cheap. Invest the £120 million for the Sherrifhall flyover to the core paths and active travel.

**Outcome 6: Connected (with your community and to the internet). The Draft Poverty Plan has 4 actions under this outcome: 6.1 – 6.4. Do you think all of these actions are needed?**

- Many facilities are now operating in East Lothian to reduce inequality and improve inclusiveness (groups which meet regularly for companionship). Where these are funded by Local Area Partnerships (finance from ELC) there must be control so that villages in the Area Partnership get the same benefits as the town. Too often the town seems to get the lion's share. One LAP handed out Tablets to all its disabled residents in the town but disabled village residents got nothing. And any applications by organisations from LAPs must be closely scrutinised so that the criteria of reducing inequality is met. A sports club being allocated £10000. It needs to state its intentions eg giving coaching to those who cannot afford coaching otherwise, providing equipment for the same reason. And any organisation that gets this amount of money needs to prove that it has spent it correctly. And not just used it for the benefit of current members.

- I'd just add that lifelong learning - such as that made available when there were Individual Learning Accounts that enabled students to access funding - should be used as a way of engagement in civil society. An independent Scotland needs an informed, pro-active and engaged community. That's not going to happen by accident.

**Outcome 7: Empowered and Responsible. The Draft Poverty Plan has 7 actions under this outcome: 7.1 – 7.6. Do you think all of these actions are needed?**

- Every resident needs to be involved in all Council policies. Council policies should not be dictated by Councillors or Council staff, Local Area Partnerships or Community Councils. Too often Community Councils do not consult residents in an area before going ahead and contacting ELC. Very few residents attend CC meetings pre Covid. During Covid restrictions some CC meetings were held via Zoom but members of the public were not permitted to be included. Community Councillors are often co-opted and do not apply/not elected. They are either friends of Community Councillors or the Chairman. And regularly Community Councillors have their own agenda that they want to promote.
- My emphasis throughout is on education. I'm part of the generation born in the 1950s whose life chances were utterly transformed by education which was free at the point of delivery. I am one of 13 cousins. Every one went to university or trained for employment. Our grandparents worked in mills, down the pits, or on the railways. Our parents saw education as the way to enable my generation to have a better life in the absence of their being any 'silver spoons' to hand around.

**Are there any other action(s) you think should be included in the Plan under outcome 7?**

- Hope the “experienced” are helped to express their experiences without feeling wary. Trust will be witnessed in changes.
- Build trust by funding quicker responses and listeners.
- Ties in with what I said above about community wealth building in 4 above. If 20% of the City Deal money was for local communities then this would unleash empowerment.

**Do you think the Council or any other public body could do more to reduce poverty and inequality in East Lothian?**

- Better services looking at poverty and the possibilities of people falling into poverty. Trying to stop poverty before it happens.
- Respond quickly. Reward positive actions by families, groups, individuals courageous enough to join conversations.
- Poverty, deprivation and inequality needs to be adequately defined before improvement can take place.
- What ELC should have been doing over the last 20 years was refusing planning permission for the thousands of executive houses built in the county

resulting in overcrowded schools and health centres, leisure facilities, overcrowded roads and trains (majority of new residents have highly paid jobs in Edinburgh) And there is hardly any countryside left for those that simply want to walk and enjoy it.

No point in blaming Scottish Government for foisting quotas of housing (always executive average cost £350000) on East Lothian, the problem existed before this.

ELC currently only builds tiny amount of affordable homes each year, usually unattractive at rents that low paid residents cannot afford. Only flats for small families and single people, 95% of people on Housing Transfer list want a house with small garden.

ELC should be spending finance on buying back ex council Housing bought under Right to Buy. Much more attractive properties and regularly suitable for families.

Housing allocation policy needs redrawn to give priority to low paid working people with employment in East Lothian. Too often ELC is allocating housing to those living in other areas of Scotland who have no good reason for moving to East Lothian. And if older people want move to East Lothian to be nearer family and are selling property elsewhere they do not need to be on ELC Housing List, plenty of properties are available in East Lothian to purchase. The only way to reduce inequality is to ensure that people have employment, not just low paid part time employment but employment that pays salaries above the minimum wage. East Lothian should not be basing its economy on simply tourism. ELC should be working to bring major employers into the area, reducing commuting to Edinburgh. People spend their disposable income where they work and better quality jobs would improve the local economy. Less commuting would free up people's time giving them more time to be involved in their community, helping to reduce inequality. In addition it would help their own mental health.

For too long East Lothian politicians and Council staff have not stood up for East Lothian and promoted it well enough when dealing with Edinburgh and the other Lothian authorities. East Lothian has been seen as the poor relative, a convenient place where thousands of executive houses are built on its Green Belt to house Edinburgh workers but without any adequate infrastructure being put in place.

Also required is a total review of Council Tax bands. It is unacceptable that 2 bedroom terraced properties without driveways and inadequate parking are in Band C while 4 bedroom detached properties with garages and driveways are only in Band E.

If poverty is to be reduced in East Lothian it is not simply a case of increasing benefits to those deemed to be in poverty it is a plan for employment, decent affordable housing, affordable public transport, better affordable health and leisure facilities that is needed.

- Subsidised activities, Drama, Art, Sport, out door activities for kids and well-bring activities for adults. Make oportunities & information more accessible to everyone.
- A million things, consult with the public in a more user friendly way, this survey is confusing especially to someone who will not be able to understand these questions.

- I'd like to focus here on housing and specifically second homes and holiday lets. First, I'd argue very strongly for a surcharge to be placed on second homes (ie where the owner lives elsewhere and keeps a second home empty for their convenience). There's a climate emergency yet Scotland is going to have to spend massively in terms of both cash and resources (wood, bricks, bathroom fittings, boilers etc) and energy to build new homes when East Lothian is already full of existing homes that lie empty. One cannot force people not to have private second homes but they can certainly be required to pay a surcharge for a "home" that no one loves in. Empty houses do not support local businesses so empty houses effectively undermine the whole of the community's potential for prosperity. Similarly holiday lets (and Airbnb) bring visitors but the owners of holiday lets should be paying a per bed night tax to contribute to the provision of local services. There are 18 houses in my street of which 11 are holiday lets and seven lived-in homes. Permanent residents are supporting the high street 52 weeks a year: what are the other 11 doing? East Lothian has the best tourist facilities in Scotland but permanent residents shouldn't be subsidising owners of multiple properties
- Issuing temporary blue badges for parking when needed, provide short term help for those with health issues.
- More social housing, (for rent) - more realistic cost of so called "affordable housing" - more support for people in financial difficulty - advice on energy costs and how to access best rate for these
- It needs to use its Climate Change Strategy Action Plan as a catalyst for reducing poverty and inequality.
- Make sure that people are paying their way.
- Focus on working with poorer families living in affluent areas to reduce stigma of poverty. Poorer families can find themselves excluded in affluent areas which affects their wellbeing and the self-esteem of their children.
- All councils and other public bodies can always do more on this issue and the draft plan outlines many important further steps to be taken over the next couple of years. However, I recognise the unprecedented funding pressures they are currently facing local authorities and the limits this places on their ability to do as much as they would like. It is also important to set the efforts of local organisations in the wider context of government cuts at both UK and Scottish level, including the impending cuts to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, both of which are likely to drive more households into poverty.

### **Appendix 3: Comments from Pennypit Trust clients**

#### **What does poverty mean to you?**

Not having a car not having enough money for basic necessity

Not being able to feed my kids and constantly worrying about running low on essential foods, toilet rolls and day to day living

No more for basic needs. E.g. food, warmth, shelter etc

Always having no money, having to watch where my next meal is coming from often giving the kids and I go without.

A lot as it helps a lot of families

People have next to no money and struggle to survive on a day to day basis

Not being able to do things that other families might be able to do, like buy fruit and veg all the time or go out on a lot of trips

Not eaten - choices between heating and eating

Going without

Living day to day scrimping and scraping, struggling to pay the bills and buy food and clothes for our children

People who struggle financially

Poverty means not having much money and having to watch your spending. Juggling money and deciding what is the priority. Like if you need food shopping but kids need new clothes and shoes

Not having enough money to live off after outgoings are accounted for

No food on the table no electricity don't know tried everything

Children not having adequate meals at home

#### **What do you think is the most important thing to be done to reduce poverty?**

Put more help available and give people support to get the help they need

Continue with food banks, the lunch club which can be a life saver

Communities coming together to help beat poverty

There should be more help for unemployed folk and like the lunch clubs, breakfast clubs and holiday groups they should be funded more as they helped me significantly throughout the summer this year.

So people can feed their families

Make sure there is plenty advice and support out there

Help in the community

Help the ones without and the ones who put kids first and go without themselves

There should be different ways of testing to see if you can get free school dinners and help with uniform costs. We are a one income family and above the threshold for any sort of help which is unfair

Make child care less expensive so people can work more and people that are on benefits to receive a fair amount of benefits to get by on

Try and budget where possible.

Increase NMW and supporting initiatives such as The Pennypit trust for lunch clubs and family support.

Government need to change

**If you had to access emergency help with food (e.g. Foodbank, Pantry Community Kitchen) since March 2020, why did you?**

Problems of having to put gas and electric in and not being awarded school grant ect in time

I have and I was welcomed not judged, which resulted in me crying and feeling overwhelmed

To pay bills, to try get help with food to get myself back on my feet

Reduced hours

Money did not stretch enough

I struggle to budget my finances well

Furloughed loss of income rise in Costs of food

Money does not cover outgoings

We got deliveries every week from the community as my dad was dying from cancer so we had to isolate

Loss of income when my partner was working due to a mix up with his wages and benefits not coving enough to get by on

I did the cooking sessions, and then needed alittle help with food as I didn't feel comfortable being a single parent taking the kids shopping with me.. I also had delays with different benefits due to having a small child

PSG Lunch Club and the Pennypit pantry, wages do not cover outgoings. I work full time and yet I still can't make ends meet. This is embarrassing and upsetting for me to admit but the trust always help me and similar families out with no questions or judgement.

Furloughed not enough to pay the bills

**What is working well to support you?**

Food bank

Contact with family support worker Natalie, input from Jonathan and Lorraine and help throughout the summer holidays from lunchclub

Pennypit Trust



The community hub near me but of funding runs out I worry.

Getting help

Having people out there I know I can talk to and I'm

Not judged

Fa'side fridge/ community pantry

Pennypit trust support with food and activities for kids

Pantry

I think they are doing amazing because of people and the donations but it could do with more funding from the government

The kids are back at school and getting cooked meals so that has helped a lot as I was needing to think of different things for every meal as they got bored with school lunch so was finding it hard to budget especially when kids at home instead of school.

The Pennypit Trust - especially PSG lunch club and pantry

Not myself but food pantry in East Lothian is working well

### **What is not working well – what more support do you need?**

Warm home discount the people that are in dire need don't actually receive the funding

Communication from school other than texts or emails, face to face support. Knowing there is someone to talk too

Baby groups and breastfeeding support

Help needs to be more public to people. I now have a policy of if you don't ask you never know. It's not everyone that has internet and knows the rights to things like myself I've learnt the hard way by struggling.

Electricity and gas prices

The council tax is far too high, working families are extremely worse off than anyone else. Something needs to change quickly

I don't think I need as much support as before but it is nice to know I just have to ask.

Council housing association not coming out to fix broken things or relocate along with Free School Meals. I am not eligible for FSM but still live in poverty and have to feed my kids. This puts me in a worse financial situation than when I wasn't working

Not relying on referral for food banks

More help for working families

### **Other comments**

Even though my partner and myself work, we can sometimes need support which I haven't had a problem getting and often put back into the food pantry in Prestonpans

The Pennypit has been exactly what the community has needed to help more unfortunate people. Including myself they have helped massively

Universal credit needs to be better sorted. Rather than being penalised for working, you should be better off not worse off. Council tax is at a very unaffordable level and there should be help towards uniform costs for those people who use services such as the lunch club or food banks as there is obviously a real level of poverty there

I couldn't be anymore grateful to everyone for various support since 2020 and before. those who did lunch and holiday club took the weight off for finding the kids different things to do and eat. Carrie who did cooking sessions(cook along with Carrie) made me feel more confident about cooking various meals from scratch that helped keep the kids full for longer which reduced the snacking. Those who gave my youngest toys and clothing was really appreciated as it took the weight off for finding the extra money at the time

I cannot thank the Pennypit Trust enough for their support over covid but even before that. PSG Lunch club has been a lifeline for my family and the staff are just the best. I'm getting emotional even typing this just now

Just because people work doesn't mean they are better off, low income families not entitled to free school meals or help with winter utilities

## Appendix 4: Comments from Care Experienced Young people



### The East Lothian Champions Board Response to the Poverty Plan 21- 23

The East Lothian Champions Board were asked for their views around the East Lothian Councils Poverty 21-23 Plan. The team developed a digital session around the proposed consultation questions and a survey. This document outlines the response from the young people with an additional case study based on Voice.

#### Approach

The East Lothian Champion Board was keen to ensure that Voice was respected and valued for their time and reflections around an emotive topic such as poverty. East Lothian Champions Board therefore, took the approach to pay participants for the contribution to the consultation. The East Lothian Champions Board and East Lothian Council agreed on the best method to compensate the contribution. The agreement was to purchase vouchers for the participants to ensure there would be no interference with their universal credit benefit claim

The East Lothian Champions Board feels this approach should be replicated going forward when engaging with Voice that has or is currently experiencing adversity and deprivation.

In total 20 Care Experienced people received £10 voucher at the cost of £200 from the East Lothian Councils Equalities budget.

#### Methodology

The East Lothian Champions Board methodology was predicated on a relationship based participation approach with care experience people. The survey and group engagement design was based on the questions from the consultation. In particular, the team had a real interest in understanding the experiences of stigma, material poverty and what it means to experience poverty as a care experienced person. Thus, survey and session plan used the prompt questions to help inform further integration of lived experiences within the engagement process.

#### Method

The team were keen to hear from a wide range of Voice and experiences and devised a suite of options for people to engage with including:

- Digital Group
- Survey
- One to Ones with trusted workers

The result meant we offered a safe engagement opportunity for Care Experience people to feed into the consultation based on structured questions. This was to ensure consistency across the board.

### **Partners**

The survey was shared with the young people who attend East Lothian Champions Board, East Lothian 15+ team, Heavy Sound and Who Cares? Scotland's East Lothian advocate. This was to ensure the wide range of experiences and Voice was captured.

### **Numbers**

Survey: 19 Voices (1 duplicate response)

The digital group: 2 Voices

### **Voice**

In total all respondents answered 14 questions, the questions explored knowledge of poverty, stigma, material poverty, food insecurity, support and suggestions of what East Lothian can do to alleviate or prevent poverty. This section explores each question with a summary of responses.

### **What does poverty mean to you?**

All but one survey respondents reflected that poverty means no money to have your basic needs to live. There was reflections about the structural impact on poverty in particular the Government(s) should be responding to poverty more meaningfully.

***“Shit governments, can't feed yourself, struggle to pay rent, work all month and still cannot afford life”***

In both group engagement, and in the survey there was an acknowledgement that some people do not see themselves living in poverty but according to poverty benchmarking will be regarded as living in poverty. The complex nature of what poverty is and the varying strands and element of poverty were also highlighted.

***“knowledge of absolute poverty but not fully aware of what poverty is and the different strands of poverty, lack of basic needs but also not having access to luxury items which we take for granted, not having access to things such as haircuts etc people working full time can still be in poverty”***

The overall message was poverty means not being able to participate in things people take for granted.

***“Not being able to afford food, gas, electricity, clothes, kids not being able to take part in activity etc”***

### **Do you think there is stigma around people living in poverty?**

It was mostly agreed that there is a lot of stigma around living in poverty with **72.2%** agreeing with this statement. Whilst **27.8%** did not know. Within the group session, there was 100% with reflections about benefit claimants being in particular stigmatised by society.

### **Poverty is a lifestyle choice statement**

This statement was posed to all participants to explore stigma around poverty further. The question asked if you agreed with it or not with the statement. Overwhelmingly, in both survey response and group engagement, participants felt this statement was wrong. Participants cited that structural factors and not enough support could be the result of poverty.

***"Not all people can help being poor it's not easy"***

***"Is it hell!! The government is to do with it"***

***"It is not a choice this statement is wrong people work all day every day and still don't have what you need to survive"***

***"That it is not a choice and people don't have enough support to help them learn how to budget and get work, a lot of people believe that people who live in poverty are lazy and not smart enough for a job and they couldn't be more wrong, it's just that they didn't have enough guidance and support"***

### **What do you think is important to have for a decent standard of living?**

Most participants outlined what could be considered as basic human needs as important to being able to have a decent standard of living.

***"Food water house heating clothes hot water"  
"Housing, heat, clothes, and a shower or bath"***

Whilst others felt that having enough money for the family to participate within their community and activities was important to them and their children.

In the group session, a participant spoke of the importance of having enough money for traveling to college or work, as this could be a real barrier to education and employment.

***"food on the table, hot water, clothes to wear, heating, being able to be part of groups and learn new skills, friends, family"***

However, other participants spoke about having good mental health, relationships, and support managing money and budgeting were really important to them in order to have a good standard of living.

**“ good mental health and self- esteem.  
And to have a healthy life”**

**“Family, love”**

**“Someone to talk too”**

**“So you can thrive and achieve your potential”**

**Do you feel you have enough money to cover your everyday expenses/bills?**

42% said they did not have enough to cover their bills, which suggest some of the respondents will be getting into debt.

**Do you have enough money to save regularly?**

Over 63% of participants stated they did not have enough money to save regularly which coincided with the group response. The group discussion also expanded on the fact that not having the ability to save meant when things go wrong there is no safety net meaning some people have to resort to credit cards, overdrafts and pay day loans.

**Do you think having the latest devices (phone, laptop, TV) is a luxury or necessity?**

Almost 50% felt that having the latest devices was a necessity, citing reasons around online learning and keeping in contact with their children. The other half of respondents felt it was a luxury. During the group session there was discussion around having technology is a need, which has been compounded by the pandemic. There was reflections around the ability to continue studying, work or claiming universal credit if you do not have such things as laptops, iPad and phones.

***“Necessity as being digitally connected  
can be a lifeline for some people”***

**If you had to access emergency help with food (e.g. Foodbank, Pantry Community Kitchen) since March 2020, what was the reason that let you to requiring this support?**

Food insecurity featured heavily during the pandemic, with only 4 out of the 17 survey respondents stating they did not need to use a food bank or a community kitchen. Some participants stated they had to use it as they had no food due to being in the house for long periods especially when the household had children. Several participants responded that they had delays with claiming universal credit. Others found their income had been reduced or stopped complete due to lockdown.

***“Because I am unable to work and because of covid. Universal Credits took months”***

*“Because there was not enough money to cover the expenses we don't normally use ie electricity we used more being at home”*

*“Yes because I was unable to put food on the table and heat the house”*

### **What was your experience of having to seek help with food?**

Respondents accessing the support of a worker, network or family found the process relatively easy. However, some noted that the food was still not enough to feed their household. Whilst other respondents acknowledged the feeling of shame and embarrassment having to seek help with food.

*“Still couldn't eat what was given as not proper meals provided for healthy living”*

*“Stressful and embarrassing”*

*“I had a good support system around me so it was easy getting food”*

*“embarrassing felt ashamed”*

### **Compared to March 2020 (before the COVID- 19 pandemic) how is your household's financial situation?**

Two respondents spoke about how their financial situation had improved, one citing the picked up extra shifts to cover the financial shortfall from household income when their family member was furloughed.

Nine other respondents stated it was the same or didn't know. However, those who had lost their job or saw their household expenditure increase felt the financial burden. One respondent also reflected on the reduction of the universal credit lift is going impact them.

*“I lost my job due to this and my bills and rent have run up so much since that I will be paying them off for years to come I've had to sell things to keep food on the table”*

*“It's substantially worse”*

*“worse now due to getting extra £20 per week because of covid now that's being stopped so I will be £80 worse off each month.”*

### **If you were needing financial support who would you go to for help?**

Most of the response for this question were around workers, such as social workers and support workers, organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland and family members. A couple of respondents felt confident to apply for the Welfare fund direct. In the group session some of the participants spoke about in the

inequity of support and is completely dependent on the worker. Others noted that knowing where to go for support was crucial.

What do you think is the most important thing to be done to reduce poverty? The general sense from the respondents to ameliorate poverty is to increase household income. Some suggested scrapping Universal Credit and replacing it with a system that is more fair like universal basic income. Others felt that increasing the minimum wage would help people.

*“Getting rid of UC and having a better system in place. Rethinking the standard monthly allowance”*

*“Double child payment”*

*“spreading more awareness about poverty. Double child payments People knowing about their entitlements if they are in poverty.”*

*“Higher min wages making sure people have food and a home”*

Whilst others felt whilst in the cycle of debt it feels impossible to get out of poverty. Other respondents felt there should be better paid opportunities offered to Care Experienced people.

*“Eliminate debt it's a vicious circle”*

*“More support in schools and getting young people into higher education to give them better chances”*

*“A lot of more opportunities for people who don't have a good life or hasn't as they have grown up which is sad and I think everyone in that situation needs more help and understood more”*

*“Give CEYP more opportunity's and support them to get to higher paying Jobs.”*

**Do you think the Council or any other public body could do more to reduce poverty and inequality in East Lothian?**

The general consensus from respondents was that the Council or public bodies could be doing more. Support featured heavily with income maximisation, budgeting and linking people to the right services.

*“yes help people to manage there finances, have more support for people who are struggling, more support for single parents”*



***“Yes give each family couple hundred pound more”***

***“Yes 100% have more facilities for homeless people and accommodations”***

There was a call to action to East Lothian Council and other public bodies to lean on Voice, lived experiences and really listen to their experiences.

***“Awareness of people entitlements. Listening to different voice e.g Public’s Voice and lived experience.”***

**Would you like to be involved in further work around the East Lothian Councils Poverty Plan in future?**

Four recipients have left their contact details and expressed an interest to be involved in further poverty plan work in the future.

**The East Lothian Champions Board would like to thank everyone who contributed to the digital session and survey.**

***“Better pay for the work you’re giving, reduce food prices as they are high for no reason, people shouldn’t have to pay to have access to a human right in the first place.”***