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REPORT TO: MEMBERS' LIBRARY

MEETING DATE: November 2022

BY: Executive Director - Place

SUBJECT: Update on Poverty Plan and Actions to Mitigate the Cost of Living Crisis

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide elected members with an update on the Poverty Plan and actions being taken by the Council to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to note this report.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council approved the 2021-2023 East Lothian Poverty Plan in October 2021. The Plan takes a Prevention and Early Intervention approach based around seven outcomes.



3.2 The main part of the Plan is an Action Plan that sets out 49 actions that should be prioritised over the next two years to meet the outcomes.

1. Working and free from in-work poverty

Nine actions under this outcome are taken from the Economic Development Strategy, the City Region Deal, and the Developing the Young Workforce Plan. These actions include:

- Attract good quality jobs into the area, providing opportunities for career progression and in work training.
- East Lothian should become a 'Living Wage' area and the council and its public sector partners should lead this process by achieving Scottish Living Wage Accreditation.
- Implement the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce Plan for East Lothian and work with the business community and other partners to provide support for skills development, focusing on those further from the labour market.

2. Financially Included

The eight actions that aim to ensure that people can access advice and support to help them get the benefits they are entitled to include:

- Enhance the impact of independent advice services by improved targeting of income maximisation checks and debt and money advice for those who are most vulnerable.
- Maximise the uptake of new Scottish Security benefits.
- Address the causes of food poverty/insecurity.

3. Having a Home – a decent, affordable, warm and dry home

This outcome has six actions, based on the Local Housing Strategy, including:

- Increase supply and range of affordable housing options.
- Increase supply of appropriate temporary accommodation to reduce the reliance on B&B accommodation and provide improved long-term outcomes for those who find themselves homeless.
- Reduce Fuel Poverty and increase the awareness and uptake of energy efficiency advice.

4. Educated

The eight actions that contribute to the key aim of closing the poverty related attainment gap include:

- Raise awareness of the impact of poverty on education and what education can do to mitigate the cycle of poverty.

- All schools to work to reduce the attainment gap with a real understanding of the way in which poverty affects attainment.
- Expand efforts to address food insecurity and morning hunger for children and young people.

5. Healthy and Well – people in East Lothian enjoy healthier lives and health inequalities are eliminated

This outcome has six actions that are aligned to priorities established by the Health and Social Care Partnership and NHS Lothian to reduce health inequalities including:

- Improve access to mental health services.
- Tackle the growing problem of social isolation.
- Improve the Cancer Journey for people affected by cancer.

6. Resilient and Well Connected

The five actions under this outcome include:

- All sectors and communities work in partnership to tackle poverty and the causes of poverty.
- Address the Digital Divide.
- Develop more integrated travel solutions that better meet local need, particularly in more rural areas.

7. Empowered and Responsible

This outcome has seven actions that aim to keep tackling poverty at the heart of policy making, including:

- Ensure people with lived experience of poverty and inequality have an input into the development and monitoring delivery of the Plan.
- East Lothian Council and the East Lothian Partnership will continue their strong commitment to tackling poverty and inequality as a core ambition.

3.3 A multi-agency Poverty Working Group has been established to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan. It includes representatives of key council services and partners such as NHS Lothian, and Volunteer Centre East Lothian. Other members include representatives of the Financial Inclusion Network and the East Lothian Friendly Food Network. A key priority for the working group is to ensure that the voices and views of people with lived experience are heard and influence the delivery of the plan's actions and the development of the next Plan.

3.4 The Council has used funding from its COVID Recovery Fund to create a temporary (two-year) Equalities and Tackling Poverty post to support the delivery of the Poverty Plan. Since coming into post in May 2022, as well as supporting the Working Group and developing links with key partners

and stakeholder groups, this officer has drafted the latest Child Poverty Action Report and led various projects including the Boost Your Income Campaign (on Benefits realisation), the Summer Holiday Food, Activities and Childcare Programme and engagement with people with lived experience.

Funding to tackle poverty

3.5 When considering the level of support the council provides to mitigate the impact of poverty it should be noted that a large part of some service budgets supports low income households and people in need. For example, the 2022/23 budget includes the following allocations for services that either support early intervention and prevention activity to reduce poverty or mitigate the impact of poverty:

- Adult Wellbeing Services - £62.9m
- Children's Services - £17.85m
- Homelessness Service - £2.3m
- East Lothian Works - £1.3m
- East Lothian Advice Consortium - over £1m in 3 years
- Clothing Grants - £287k
- Pupil Maintenance - £238k
- Financial Inclusion Service - £192k

3.6 As previously reported to members, the council's 2021/22 budget included over £1.3m to support vulnerable people impacted by COVID (£906k carry forward from the 2020/21 budget and a further £415k awarded by the Scottish Government). Initiatives funded through these funds included:

- £300k Additional funding for the Scottish Welfare Fund
- £150k Fuel Poverty (£100 payments to people in fuel poverty)
- £174k Children's Services and family support workers
- £202k Food initiatives, Food Network and Foodbank
- £105k Youth Work and digital inclusion
- £40k Social Isolation/Befriending community projects

3.7 In addition, the council distributes several new Scottish Government funding streams for households eligible to receive Free School Meals totalling just under £2m; extension of universal Free School Meals to P4 and P5, cash payments in lieu of Free School Meals during summer, half-term; Christmas and New Year holidays; and, the Scottish Child Payment Bridging Payments. The Scottish Child Payment Bridging Payments bring together the COVID hardship payments and the Family Pandemic Payment into one payment, made four times a year. These payments, which are available for each child who is eligible for free school meals

because of low income, totalled £520 in 2021/22 and were increased to £650 in 2022/23.

- 3.8 The council's 2022/23 budget includes an additional allocation of £350k from reserves for Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grant and Community Care Grants to augment the funding from the Scottish Government, bringing the total SWF budget up to £931k. The 2022/23 budget also allocated £758,500 (50% of Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery {LACER} funding received from the Scottish Government) to support low income households. The following table provides an update on how the allocations made from this fund have been used.

Allocation of £758,500 Low Income Household Budget

	£	Update
Benefits Awareness and Take Up Campaign from 8 th Sept – 9 th Oct; funding for Haddington CAB to provide an additional adviser during the campaign; additional print runs of leaflets	18,000	The Boost your Income Campaign promoted via new page on the Council website and radio and EL Courier adverts provided both general information about benefits and where advice can be sought as well as targeted campaigns for older people and young families
Scottish Welfare Fund – supplementary Cost of Living Assistance payment	420,000	In the first two months (September and October) £88,000 has been paid out in £100 grants in addition to Crisis Care or Community Care Grants as an alternative to referring people to the EL Foodbank
Children's Services to assist vulnerable children and families and Looked After Young People	90,000	Children's Services launched access to the fund on 8 th November for staff to apply on behalf of low income households who are affected by the pandemic and cost of living crisis; providing shopping vouchers to be used food or other essentials in a range of supermarkets
Adult Social Work (including third parties) to provide funds to vulnerable clients in financial hardship	75,000	14 Shared Lives Carers will receive a payment of £250 to assist with cost of living pressures Macmillan/ Marie Curie to receive £15k to help their clients with cost of living pressures Adult Social Work has £56,500 to support vulnerable adults with cash payments or vouchers
Support for food initiatives	112,000	£27k to Fareshare Hub to purchase supplies to augment donations from supermarkets etc. £30k to EL foodbank to purchase supplies £55k to support provision of hot meals by community food initiatives

Women's Aid East and Midlothian	13,500	To provide cash for emergency food, clothing, housing needs, rent for women and children affected by domestic abuse/violence
To be determined	30,000	Allocation of the remaining £30k to be determined based on evaluation of previous allocations and ongoing or new demand

3.9 Appendix 1 provides an evaluation of the Boost Your Income Campaign. This shows that the 'investment' of £16,500 that was spent on the campaign and providing additional capacity for Haddington CAB to deal with enquiries arising from the campaign, realised financial gains of just under £125,000 for 64 people. This equates to an average increase in income of around £2,000 per person, and £7.50 gained for every £1 spent on the campaign.

3.10 The council is continuing with the Boost Your Income theme on its website ([here](#)). We are also updating and re-printing the useful [ELC Helping with the cost of living A5 Sept22 FINAL.pdf](#) leaflet and the heating your home and energy efficiency leaflet [ELC Managing Energy bills and Heating Your Home 2022 A5 Guide v8 \(2\).pdf](#).

2022 Summer Holiday Food, Activities and Childcare Programme

3.11 The Council received £161,537 from the Scottish Government to provide targeted access to activities, childcare and food for children age 5-14 from low income families throughout the 2022 summer holiday period.

3.12 The funding supported activities and programmes targeted at children in the priority groups, over and above existing programmes run by council services including Connected Communities, sport and arts services, and Children's Services and third sector groups such as the East Lothian Play Association and After School Clubs.

3.13 An evaluation of the programme which has been lodged in the Members' Library [13522 Summer Holiday Food Activities and Childcare.pdf](#) reported that almost 8,300 hours of childcare was provided as part of the programme and over 13,500 snacks and lunches were provided, benefitting 1,777 children and young people. In addition, 58 children and young people took part in activities specifically targeted at additional support needs. Also just over 100 children and young people also received intensive family support through Children's Services.

'Warm Place with a Friendly Face'

3.14 East Lothian Council recognises the potential wellbeing and financial challenges that will be faced by many residents in our local communities in the coming months as a result of the rise in energy prices and the cost of living crisis.

3.15 In response to the growing interest in having local 'warm zones, spaces or hubs' in our communities the Council and its partners have developed a

‘Warm Place with a Friendly Face’ approach. This builds on what already exists in many Council and community run buildings that are open to people during normal operating hours (e.g. libraries and community centres), where members of the public can use services and participate in activities in warm, welcoming spaces. For example, many of the council’s libraries provide free activities including knit and natter, crafts, jigsaws, etc. for adults as well as activities for children including code clubs, crafts, book bug, etc. And of course, members of the public can visit their local library and just come in to read the books and newspapers that are available.

3.16 The council’s Connected Communities team, Area Partnerships and key local groups such as Volunteer Centre East Lothian (VCEL), Community Councils, Tenants and Residents Associations, Churches and other local organisations have been reviewing what exists in local communities. They are identifying local solutions to the concerns being expressed about how we can support those in our communities who may need assistance during the winter period. Area Partnerships have set aside part, or in some cases all, of their discretionary funding for 2022/23 to support people through the cost of living crisis.

3.17 Some of the activities that are being put on in community buildings under the ‘Warm Place with a Friendly face’ banner across East Lothian to support people through the winter months include:

- Bite and Blether: chat with a light lunch for over 65 yr olds in both Wallyford and Whitecraig Community centres every Wednesday lunchtimes
- Humbie Soupersnacks in Humbie Village hall
- Lunch club and social activities in the Lynton Day Centre, Dunbar (Monday to Friday, 10 – 4pm)
- Our Community Kitchen (food with socializing) in Haddington Bowling Club
- Lunch With A Bunch sessions for over 60s in Prestonpans British Legion every Thursday lunchtime
- Longniddry community centre cafe open all week from 10 - 3pm

Assistance with Energy Bills

3.18 East Lothian has received an ‘ex gratia’ grant of £1m from Community Windpower, the company that owns the Aikengall I, II and IIa Windfarms. This fund which will be administered and distributed by Advice Direct which also administers the Scottish Government’s Home Heating Support Fund across the country. The fund will support vulnerable people with contributions to their electricity bills and additional payments, depending on their household’s circumstances, for example where a member of the household has a long term illness and/or disability, where a member of the household is a pensioner or where there are children.

- 3.19 Only one application can be made by, or on behalf of, a household and Advice Direct will try to screen out duplicate or fraudulent applications. The maximum payment to a household will be £1,200 and it is expected that around 1,200 people/households will benefit from the scheme.
- 3.20 The scheme is due to be operational by the end of November and will run through to the end of March 2023, with applications to the fund made by individuals online or through referral partner organisations. The council will be a 'trusted partner' for the scheme, and council services will be able to refer 'clients' who are on benefits or who are deemed to be on low income and in financial hardship (e.g. tenants in rent arrears; applicants for SWF Crisis and Community Care Grants; care experienced young people supported by Children's Services; vulnerable adults / carers supported by Adult Social Work; people seeking advice and assistance from Financial Inclusion Service; people in temporary accommodation).
- 3.21 Further information will be issued to members when the scheme is launched and goes live.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no policy implications from this report.

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. The expenditure detailed in the report is contained within the 2022/23 council budget and funding provided by the Scottish Government.
- 6.2 Personnel – none.
- 6.3 Other – none.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Appendix 1: Boost your Income Campaign Evaluation Report
- 7.2 Evaluation of the 2022 Summer Holiday Food, activities and Childcare programme:
[13522 Summer Holiday Food Activities and Childcare.pdf](#)

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DATE	November 2022

Appendix 1: Boost your Income Campaign Evaluation Report

From the 8th September to 9th October 2022 East Lothian Council ran a general information benefits awareness and take-up campaign. The aim was to raise awareness of the benefits and financial support available, and maximise income wherever possible in East Lothian.

The campaign was supported by a dedicated advisor at CAB Haddington who would take people through a benefits check as well as signposting to any further support required. The advisor took referrals from a variety of sources including council services, third sector organisations, clients self-referring and phone and email enquiries. The advisor was in place from 12 September – 28 October 2022.

Resources were created signposting to all financial support available, however the campaign targeted benefits that are under-subscribed, in particular pension credit, Council Tax Reduction, and benefits for children and families.

Communications Campaign

A short life working group including Financial Inclusion, Communications and Housing contributed to the planning of the campaign.

Stigma has a big part to play in preventing people from reaching out for income support, and so we wanted to make a campaign that will start remedying this stigma. Basing financial support as a fundamental human right is in line with East Lothian Council's commitment to the implementation of the UNCRC and the ethos of the East Lothian Poverty Plan.

Officers ran workshops during the planning stages of the campaign with 'lived experience' groups to gather feedback on the benefits process and messaging that would reduce barriers to reach out for support. "It's there when you need it" and a "focus on income" rather than "benefits or dole" was felt to be a less stigmatising phrasing and focus for the Campaign.

"Boost your income" became the key hook of the campaign.



The council's [Cost of Living leaflet](#) was updated to provide an overview of financial support available. Further tailored information was created online at www.eastlothian.gov.uk/boost. Over 4,000 visits were made to this page during the campaign.

Social media and articles in the Courier were used to direct traffic to the website and CAB advisors. Paid radio ads were played on Forth 1 and 2 which were targeted at the priority groups of families and pensioners, as well as general features on community radio stations.

Training

A key ask from council partners was for additional awareness raising training so that professionals working with clients were more aware of the financial support available and where they can direct people appropriately.

East Lothian Council ran an online training with Social Security Scotland which outlined the support provided by the Financial Inclusion and Revenues teams and Social Security Scotland.

Over 100 professionals from a variety of backgrounds including third sector partners, council services and statutory services joined this introductory training. Further tailored training and new materials are planned.

Financial impact

Haddington CAB has reported that the response to the campaign was strong, and the following data presents how successful the campaign response was.

Referrals were steady over the campaign, although it took a week or so before we started to see some momentum come through in terms of phone calls and referrals. Sixty four new clients either self-referred or were referred as a result of the Campaign.

Financial gains achieved for these 64 clients totalled £124,763. This return equates to an average of just under £2k per client and £7.50 gained for every £1 spent on the campaign.

The five most common benefits which the clients required assistance with were:

Universal Credit	46
PIP	36
Disability Payments	35
Attendance Allowance	13
Child Benefit	12

Clients liked the fact that the CAB advisor was able to deal seamlessly with their enquiry, and that this could be undertaken on the phone (if they were concerned about finances) and also that they had the option to be seen face to face if they felt more comfortable with that. There were some clients that were seen face to

face, which allowed the advisor to go through paperwork and circumstances with them. The flexibility of service ensured that the CAB was able to respond to clients' needs in the most appropriate way.

The case study provides an example of the impact the work funded by the benefits campaign made.

CASE STUDY

Client (33) is single and lives in a one bed Private Residential Tenancy (rent £420 per month). He has been in receipt of universal credit (UC) consisting of a single allowance and housing costs for around three years. He has previously undergone a work capability assessment and was deemed to be fit for work. He now has new health conditions since that assessment (type II diabetes and osteoarthritis and depression) and has a long-term medical certificate lodged on his UC journal. He is visited by his three-year-old daughter each week but his ex-partner has responsibility for her. He also gets Personal Independence Payment (standard daily living) and council tax reduction. He has no savings and says his landlord has issued him with a "notice to quit" and is asking him to vacate the property in six weeks' time. He wanted benefits and housing advice

ISSUES

Benefits:

Client required advice on how to maximize his income, in particular he needed to be reassessed under the universal credit work capability assessment process.

Housing:

Client needed advice on whether the notice he has received from his landlord was in order.

ACTION

Benefits:

When a claimant has already been assessed and deemed not to have limited capability for work (as here) they cannot be reassessed unless it can be shown that there has been a relevant change of circumstances in relation to their physical or mental health (Universal Credit Regulations 2013 reg 41(4)). Here the client had reported such a change. An entry to that effect was made in client's UC journal requesting a further work capability assessment. A UC50 questionnaire (capability for work form) was issued and client assisted to complete it. It was expected that this would result in him obtaining the status of having limited capability for work and work-related activity.

Housing:

Client was advised that his landlord had not served the appropriate paperwork as required by legislation so currently has no legal basis to seek to repossess the property. Client cannot seek assistance under the homelessness legislation

unless he is threatened with homelessness within two months of the correct notices being served.

Upon further investigation, it became apparent that the accommodation in which he lived was not meeting his needs on health grounds, and therefore under the homelessness legislation (Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 s.24) client could argue that he ought to be treated as homeless. A letter was sent to the homelessness team who after some resistance agreed to assess him under the homelessness legislation. We obtained a report from an occupational therapist which recommended that rehousing to a more suitable property with adaptations should be pursued. After some time, an accept letter was issued confirming that client had been accepted for re-housing.

OUTCOME

Benefits:

Client was awarded limited capability for work and work-related activity and a further element was added to his UC (£354.28) together with three months back payments due.

Housing:

Client has now been rehoused in a property under a Scottish Secure Tenancy which is better suited to his needs.