

EAST LOTHIAN POVERTY PLAN

This Plan sets the East Lothian Partnership priorities for tackling poverty in our county over the period 2024-2027

2024-2027

East Lothian Partnership Poverty Plan

Executive summary

East Lothian Partnership's plan to tackle poverty focuses on **4 key outcomes** that focus on getting more cash in people's pockets, living in resilient communities that are ready for the future. This includes:

- **Good jobs that pay fairly**, where we support people to gain the skills and training needed to find and maintain work, in flexible jobs that pay fairly.
- **Enough money from benefits**, our social security system should provide people with a fair income, but millions of pounds go unclaimed each year. We will support people to claim the income that they are entitled to.
- **Cost of living support**, daily essentials can be a financial burden that drives people into poverty. We will provide advice and support to those who are struggling with high living costs.
- **Climate change ready**, climate change will impact vulnerable and low income communities the hardest. We will take preventative action to protect and support these communities.

The way we will work will promote these outcomes.

- Making sure that poverty is **everybody's business**, and that actions to tackle poverty are part of every service plan. We will make sure that those making budget decisions understand how poverty affects people in East Lothian.
- Working in a way that is **stigma- and trauma-informed**. We have heard very clearly that stigma is preventing people from reaching out for support. We will make sure that our services are approachable, discreet and offer dignity and choice. We will help our workforce understand the impact of trauma and poverty.
- Working effectively as a **partnership**, we will build on our existing strong partnership in East Lothian. We will share data, resources and knowledge more effectively, and work towards a collective vision for East Lothian.

This will be underpinned by specific **improvements we need to make** to our current ways of working. These include actions around our housing, transport, childcare, and economy. It will require changes in the ways we work with people with lived experience of poverty, how we evaluate our projects, share our data and shape our places. It will also shape how we deliver our services, communicate about our work, and advocate for East Lothian residents.



Our key outcomes

The way we will work

Improvements we need to make

I've been eating toddler portions to make sure my kids have enough. The kids laugh but I don't. Nothing is easy and nothing is spared, even the bath water has to last for all of us.

Member of the Working for Change Collective

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“I log onto Facebook and the first thing I see is someone complaining about people on benefits. We get accused all the time that we’re lazy or scroungers, or that we’re having the time of our lives on benefits. I wish they could see the reality. You’re constantly jumping through hoops, constantly feel like you’re being judged and that they’re trying to take something away. I’m glad I can work but the restrictions are awful.”

Sean – founding member of the Working for Change Collective

Introduction

We believe that everyone in East Lothian deserves to live a life free from poverty. We will strive to make sure that people have the opportunities and support needed for long term financial stability, and be able to afford a decent standard of living.

Poverty is about more than a simple lack of money. It is forced upon people through complex circumstances. Poverty has a significant, negative impact on people's wellbeing, confidence and sense of worth. Poverty is never a choice. Poverty is a human rights issue. People have a right to an adequate standard of living, to feel included and able to participate in their community.

East Lothian is an attractive place to live and work, we are proud to be surrounded by rich landscapes and history, and benefit from our proximity and ties to Edinburgh. But East Lothian is not an easy place to be poor, with significant inequality between and within our communities.

East Lothian Partnership is committed to tackling poverty and inequality in our communities. Since the East Lothian Poverty Commission in 2016, we have been working to address the drivers of poverty and pave sustainable routes out of poverty. The first plan in 2017 set out our approach based on the Poverty Commission's report recommendations. 2020 brought the impacts of Covid-19 and cost of living crisis and our 2021-2023 plan balanced addressing the short-term impacts of these crises with the long-term drivers of poverty.

The Partnership has achieved a great deal in the last 8 years, but economic and environmental uncertainty remain. Those already experiencing poverty are facing ever starker choices. We know that the next 3 years are going to be a very challenging time. Deep poverty and destitution are rising, and many are experiencing poverty who have not experienced this level of hardship before. Our Partnership faces significant funding challenges at the same time as we adapt to a fast-growing population. Our children and older people populations are increasing, two groups who are particularly vulnerable to poverty.

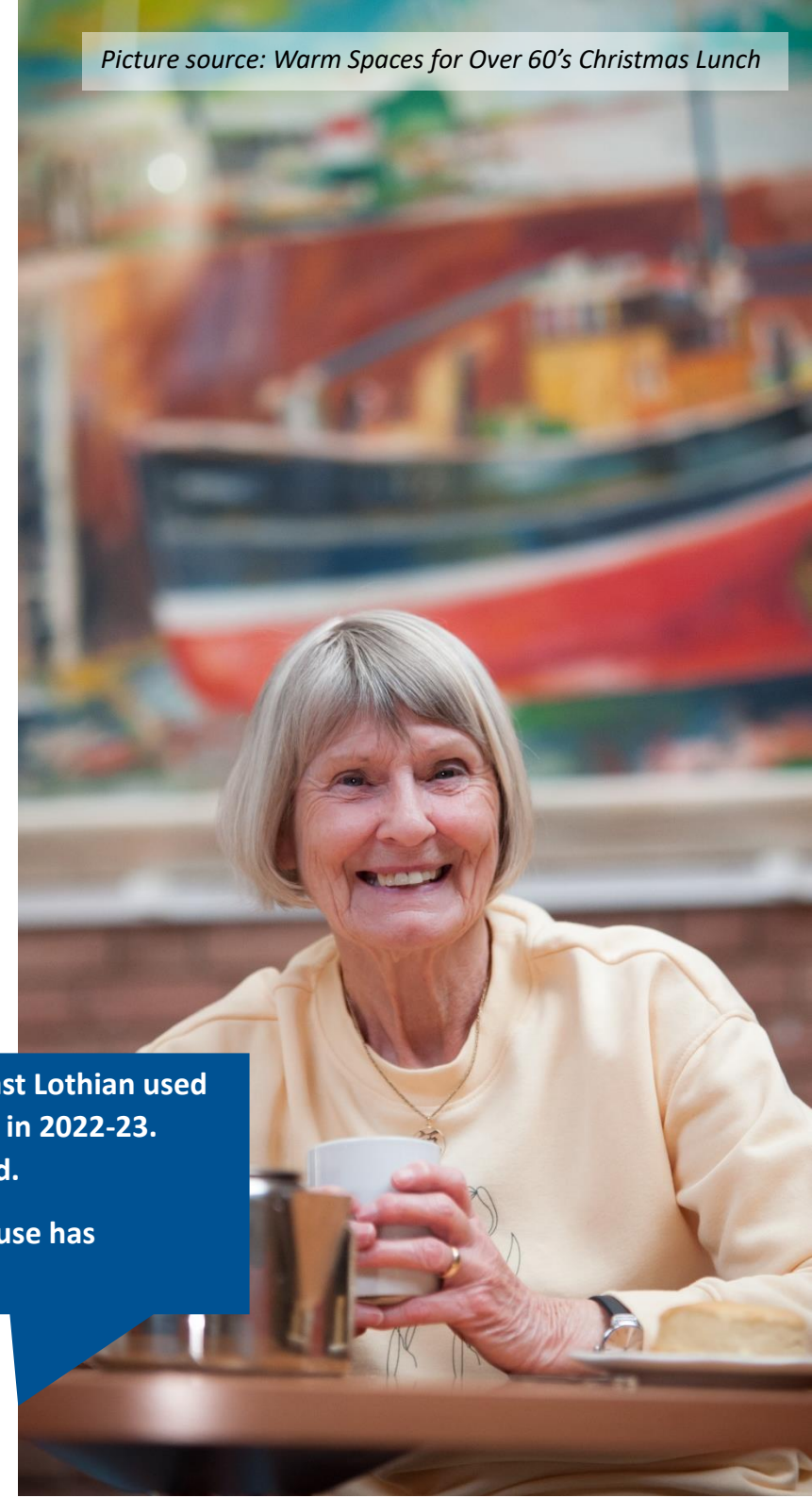
Poverty in East Lothian is not new, and through this plan we will take a preventative, long-term approach to tackling it. Our plan will be flexible and responsive. We will continue to adapt to the needs of our communities and the voice of lived experience as we work towards our vision for everybody in East Lothian to live a life that is free from poverty.

Poverty takes away people's choices. Through this strategy we will be giving them back. A set of actions will be developed alongside this plan which will be reported on annually.

5,801 households in East Lothian used East Lothian Foodbank in 2022-23.

13,927 people were fed.

Since 2017, Foodbank use has increased by 200%.



East Lothian data at a glance

East Lothian's population is growing rapidly. The 2022 Census showed East Lothian's population was 112,300, a 24.7% increase from the 2001 Census figure. 18.1% of East Lothian's population is aged 0-15 and 20.9% is aged 65 and over compared to Scottish averages of 16.6% and 19.6%. This means that there is ever growing pressure on education and children's services and care services for older people.

East Lothian has a male life expectancy of 78.7 years, which is higher than the figure of 76.5 years; and a female life expectancy of 82.1 years, which is higher than the national figure of 80.7 years. There are large differences in life expectancy between areas within East Lothian. Female life expectancy is as high as 86.4 years in more affluent areas but as low as 78.9 in areas of highest economic deprivation. Male life expectancy varies from 83.5 to 76.5.

According to the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 8 of East Lothian's 132 datazones are in the 20% most deprived in Scotland. These are all in the west of the county - 4 in the Tranent, Wallyford & Macmerry ward, 3 in the Preston Seton Gosford ward, and 1 in the Musselburgh ward. 2020 SIMD showed TWM ward has the highest proportion of 0 to 15 year olds (635 - 14.7%) in the 20% most deprived data zones.

National data on children living in absolute and relative poverty for 2021/22 shows that 12.4% of children in East Lothian were in living in absolute poverty compared to 16.5% across Scotland as a whole. This ranged from 17.6% in Musselburgh to 6.7% in North Berwick Coastal. Just over 16% of children were in relative poverty, compared to 20.8% across Scotland as a whole. This ranged from 22.2% in Musselburgh to 7.9% in North Berwick Coastal.

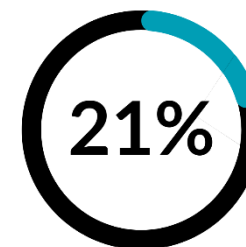
In 2022/23, 393 households were in temporary accommodation – 80 per 10,000 population, higher than the national figure of 59. 100 were households with children or a pregnant woman and 150 children were in temporary accommodation.

The Full Time median hourly pay for people living in East Lothian in 2023 was £17.71 compared to the Scottish average of £18.10. This difference is due to a substantially lower rate of pay for females. The median for males is £18.82 (compared to the Scottish median of £18.17) whereas for females the median is £16.88 (compared to the Scottish median of £18.00).

During 2022/23, East Lothian Foodbank provided food parcels for 13,656 people, an increase of 25% from the previous year. Of those fed 4,877 (36%) were under the age of 16.

Universal Credit (UC) claimants increased from 5,842 (Feb 2020) to 9,786 (Feb 2024) – a 67.5% increase (41% men 59% women). 8.3% of working age population in North Berwick Coastal ward is claiming UC, compared to 16.9% in Tranent, Wallyford, Macmerry and 18.3% in Musselburgh wards.

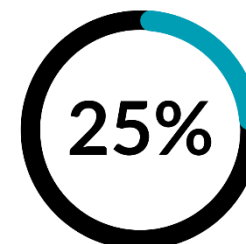
At February 2024, 1,532 UC claimants were seeking work, compared to 1,668 in February 2023. 5.8% of those seeking work in East Lothian are in the North Berwick Coastal ward compared to 25% in Musselburgh and 26.8% in Tranent, Wallyford, Macmerry wards. 59% of UC claimants are female and 41% are male. 56% of UC claimants seeking work are male and 44% are female.



of children are living in relative poverty



increase in East Lothian Foodbank use since 2017



population increase since 2001 Census



393 households were in temporary accommodation

What we have achieved in 2022-23



**£360,000 top up
of Scottish Welfare Fund**

£180,000 as cash payments



**1,428 people
£798,535.94 awarded**

Supported through
Community Windpower funding



£3,694,913

Debt handled for 475 clients
(East Lothian Advice
Consortium)



£5,164,016.45

Financial gains achieved
through Finance and Advice
Services



£1,021,291

Provided as cash first support



13,927 fed

by East Lothian Foodbank,
from 5,801 households

What we mean when we say...

<p style="text-align: center;">Poverty</p> <p>Poverty means different things to different people. It can mean going to bed instead of turning the heating on. Or splitting a tin of beans over several days. Poverty is the tough choices people have to make because of their low income.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">We measure poverty in two ways:</p> <p>Relative low income: This refers to people living in households with income below 60% of the median¹ in that year.</p> <p>Absolute low income: This refers to people living in households with income below 60% of median income in a base year, usually 2010/11. This measurement is adjusted for inflation.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Stigma</p> <p>Stigma is the feeling of disapproval or shame that people can feel (or be made to feel) when they reach out for support. This can be caused by internal feelings of pride, or external factors like negative coverage in the press or by politicians.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Trauma</p> <p>Trauma can describe an experience or event in someone's life which is painful or distressing, and which can result in lasting mental or physical side effects.</p> <p>Exposure to traumatic events is common. It affects the people we work with every day. This includes, our colleagues, the people we work with in the community, use the services we offer and come to us for help.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">People with lived experience</p> <p>People with lived experience are people with direct first-hand experience of poverty. This could be something they experienced today or 20 years ago, we are seeking to learn from their experience.</p> <p>Poverty has long-term and wide-ranging impacts on a person's life. We seek to understand the broad range of experiences so that we can design better services.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Plan</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The name of the plan.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Partnership</p> <p>How the plan is delivered and who will be involved. The East Lothian Partnership includes NHS Lothian, third sector, East Lothian Council, lived experience groups, and many others.</p>

¹ Median income is the point at which half of households have lower income and half have higher income.

What events can move people into poverty?

Events that erode people's income and other stability increases the risk of experiencing poverty, or deepening it. We understand that these common drivers may trigger the need for support.

- **Job loss and reduced earnings.** A family is seven times more likely to move into very deep poverty than someone in a family where at least one adult remains in work (21% compared to 3%). Other changes like becoming self-employed can also increase someone's risk of experiencing poverty.
- **Relationship breakdown or bereavement.** Changes in your relationship either through bereavement or separation can have a very serious impact on the risk of experiencing poverty. It can often mean a change in housing, income, and support.
- **Change in health.** Changes to your physical health and mobility can have an immediate impact on your ability to earn. For many, the immediate aftermath of an accident, diagnosis or long-term health condition are made worse by stress about money. These changes can also impact the finances of family members, for instance if they have to reduce their working hours in order to provide extra care.
- **Growing family.** Additional household costs come at the same time as reduced household income for many new or growing families. The cost of childcare is a huge issue for many working families despite policies like 1140 hours.
- **Poor mental health.** Poverty causes poor mental health and poor mental health can cause poverty. Once in poverty, people with poor mental health are more likely to fall behind with essential costs, and can find it harder to reach out for support, to find and sustain work or training, and are more likely to be socially isolated.
- **Rising housing and living costs.** Rising living costs means that people are not able to adjust to make savings, but instead face deepening poverty. Housing costs in East Lothian are high and downsizing is not always a feasible option within our housing stock.

Any of these life changes can cause a huge amount of stress, but there is financial support available. We will encourage East Lothian residents to check as soon as possible by using our free, confidential online benefits calculator or speak to a member of staff.

Who is most likely to experience poverty in East Lothian?

Scottish Government have identified the following household types as being at greater risk of poverty:

- Lone parent families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Families with a mother aged under 25
- Families with a child under one
- Larger families (3+ children)

In addition, we know that the following groups are more likely to experience poverty:

- Care experienced young people
- Pensioners/Older people
- Young people transitioning into adulthood
- Women
- Gypsy/Traveller communities
- Carers (including young carers)

What people have told us

I've been eating toddler portions to make sure my kids have enough. The kids laugh but I don't. Nothing is easy and nothing is spared, even the bath water has to last for all of us.

I only shower once a week now and it feels like it is back to my youth when we had a bath one a week in a tin bath in front of the stove in the living room because the house was so cold.

I live in a council house as a single person with children at college. I earn a decent salary that's nowhere near minimum wage. I have no money left for half the month after all my bills and living costs come off. I don't have my heating on much I have cut all bills back as much as I possibly can. This is no way to live and I know many people will be worse off than me.

Why do people have to hit rock bottom again and again before they get any support?

Families that are just on the threshold of not being able to claim benefits are worst hit especially with children. All children should be receiving free school meals and uniform unless parents are making extraordinary amounts of salary. Something needs done for these families. There are lots of benefits being put in place for people on UC and in my post I see this money being wasted day in day out with families who qualify and large families getting enough to live on. I think more advertising needs to be put in place for people to know what's out there.

In Scotland in 2022, there was 622 twin births and 9 triplet births. This was 1.36% of all maternities or 1 in 74. Currently unless you are on benefits there is no support for parents of multiples towards child care costs or anything which you need times 2 or 3 for example baby formula cost me £56 per week, nappies and wipes (I used the ALDI ones as they were cheapest) cost £20 - £25 per week, and food is extortionate. I try to get my twins clothes via friends, charity shops etc to cut the cost down.

When trying to conceive you never plan for twins and if I had one child I could have managed as my weekly nursery fees would have been £300 not £600. However what was I to do, when I glimpsed at that first scan my heart was full and having twins should be celebrated however the cost of multiples creates much anxiety. Unfortunately I have spoken to many mothers who considered abortion because the financial strain was such a worry when they found out it was a multiple birth. I cannot believe that these are the thoughts which parents of multiples need to consider to survive.

Our key outcomes



Good jobs that pay fairly

Work offers a sustainable route out of poverty: fairly paid, flexible employment enables people to be connected to their community, with an income that supports their lifestyle.

We will provide support and opportunities for people to gain the skills needed to enter and sustain employment. We will tailor this support based on people's needs, and target groups who will need more support.



Enough money from benefits

Benefits should provide a social security net for households in East Lothian. We will make sure that people are informed about the income they are entitled to, and we will make sure that this process is as straightforward as we can make it.

We will work with partners to raise awareness of the financial support available and able to direct households to the correct place to apply.



Cost of living support

The cost of daily essentials can be a huge burden that drives people into poverty. We will provide advice and support to those who are struggling with high living costs.

This will include advice on debt, budgeting, accessing safe credit, and where it is needed, and supporting organisations who provide emergency food and resources.



Climate change

Climate change will impact vulnerable and low income communities the hardest. We will take preventative action to protect and support these communities.

Tackling climate change *can* benefit how we tackle poverty – through the creation of new jobs, tackling fuel poverty, improving our transport links and our housing stock.

The way we will work



Stigma/ Trauma-informed approach

People with lived experience of poverty have told us how stigma has made it painful to reach out for the help they needed. Not being able to afford to socialise leads people to turn inward.

We will work to understand how people experience stigma and with them redesign our services where needed. We will make it easy to turn outward.

As a partnership we will develop trauma-informed approaches that will see a more understanding and compassionate workforce and volunteer-force who understand the impact poverty has on a person or family.



Working in partnership

We will continuously improve our partnership approach to tackling poverty. This will include how we collect, share and use data so that we can all understand how poverty is changing in areas.

We will work as equal partners, acknowledging that statutory and voluntary organisations are working towards the same objectives: a better life for everyone in East Lothian. We will develop tools that everyone can use, and pathways to support that everyone feels confident using.



Everybody's business

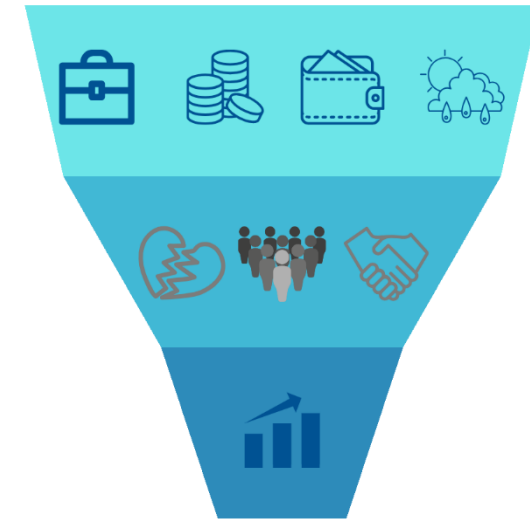
Tackling poverty is everybody's business. We will make anti-poverty activities mainstream for every service that we provide. This isn't just an issue for Foodbanks or social services, this is an issue for everyone.

We will make sure that tackling poverty is a priority in all statutory plans. In a time of cuts, we will ensure decision makers protect vulnerable people from their impact. The Council Plan prioritises poverty and we will make sure this happens. We will use all the tools at our disposal and create new tools if the old ones aren't working.

The improvements we will make

We want to make sure that we are doing all that we can, as effectively as we can. As part of the development of [the Plan] we assessed our approach with the help of the Improvement Service, and identified 9 areas for improving our approach to tackling poverty.

Six further improvements were identified as part of ongoing conversations about tackling poverty in East Lothian.



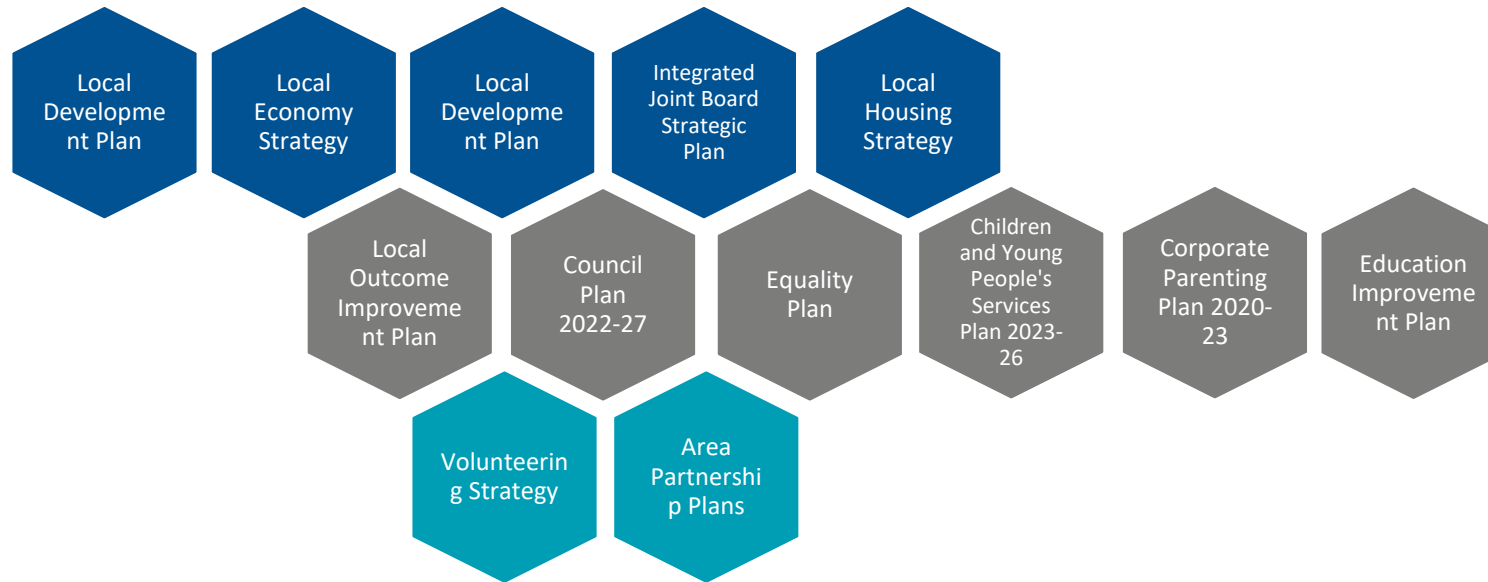
- 1) **Improve our ability to use data and intelligence from across the partnership to identify and reach low-income families who might otherwise be hidden.**
- 2) **Improve our engagement and quality of relationship with a wide range of low-income families to better understand and act upon what they tell us.**
- 3) **Support access to affordable housing through increase of supply and reduction of costs in the private sector.**
- 4) **Prioritise fair work and job creation, capitalising on community wealth building and the role of anchor institutions to support families experiencing poverty.**
- 5) **Provide awareness raising and anti-stigma training for staff and elected members at all levels.**
- 6) **Ensure we have a framework that makes responsibilities clear and highlights how individual and joint actions are contributing to poverty outcomes.**
- 7) **Improve our approach to holistic rather than siloed evaluations so we understand the true impact of our actions on households.**
- 8) **Ensure a wide range of third sector voices are given an equal voice in discussions around child poverty policy and the delivery of services.**
- 9) **Explore place based, whole family, collaborative approaches to supporting low-income families.**

Additional statements:

- 10) **Work in spaces that people feel comfortable in, and where they can access a range of services and information at the same time. Make sure these spaces are free from stigma.**

- 11) Communicate clearly about our services across multiple platforms and formats that our audiences use. Create child- and community-friendly versions of reports when it is appropriate to do so (e.g. when the content pertains to them).**
- 12) Ensure that we are using all levers available locally to make our childcare offer flexible and affordable, providing parents the right support at the right time.**
- 13) Improve staff and volunteer wellbeing through better support for our workforce experiencing burnout.**
- 14) Use our experience of delivering services and the experiences of our communities to make the case to UK and Scottish Governments to make the changes required to tackle systemic poverty and inequality.**
- 15) Ensure our transport system supports our partnership approach to tackling poverty and is adaptive to the needs of our communities.**
- 16) Address and reduce health inequalities.**
- 17) Reduce poverty related education attainment gaps.**

Tackling poverty needs to be embedded within everything we do. Actions within the following plans will contribute to our overall mission to tackle poverty in East Lothian.



The challenges we face

As we emerged from the Covid-19 economic downturn and lockdowns, inflation started to rise influenced by consumer spending and global shortages. The war in Ukraine accelerated this as fuel and wheat prices were affected by the invasion. Inflation peaked at 9.6% in October 2022 and has fluctuated since.

Rising inflation has meant that many have had to make changes to their spending habits. For those who didn't have enough to begin with, and were already making their money stretch as far as possible, further cuts has become a choice between heating or eating, and sometimes skipping both.

This has been set against a decade of low income growth, with a further decade of slow income growth predicted because of the impact of Brexit. Brexit and climate change are expected to have long term impacts on food prices, with fewer migrant workers supporting harvests, and greater volatile weather impacting on crops.

Fuel costs are expected to remain volatile with political unrest and overseas conflicts having a long-term impact. Changes to renewable energy and local sources may reduce this impact.

East Lothian Council, NHS Lothian, and our third sector partners, all face challenging funding situations. East Lothian Council must make £60 million worth of cuts over the next five years. The Third Sector in East Lothian have shown exceptional resilience in challenging funding environments, but staff and volunteer wellbeing are a rising concern in the sector in the face of rising need and diminishing resource.

In a nutshell:

- **Growing population**
East Lothian's population has had the biggest rise of any local authority area. Our population is expected to continue to rise consistently over the next 10 years. Unlike other authority areas, both our children and young people and older people population groups will increase. Both groups are vulnerable to poverty.
- **Financial pressures on services**
A growing population will increase statutory costs, particularly our older care services. Because of the number of people moving in to the county we do not know the needs of this population.
- **Complexity of cases**
Prolonged hardship has had a significant impact on people's mental health and resilience. We are seeing a rise in complex cases, with a wider range of interventions needed. This results in longer time working with an individual or household.
- **Climate change**
It is likely that the next decade will require radical lifestyle changes for everyone. People who are living with poverty are likely to already be living a low-carbon lifestyle, but have fewer resources to make bigger changes that may become expected. We must target climate adaptations with low income households in mind.

Out of 160 council tenants surveyed, 53% report that their mental health has suffered because of the cost of living. 50% are struggling with anxiety, stress or depression. 40% could not sleep at night.

How we developed this plan

- 8 Community engagement sessions in June 2023 (in Musselburgh, Prestonpans, Tranent, North Berwick, Haddington and Dunbar) listening to people's broad experiences of poverty and how they want to see services developing in East Lothian.
- 3 Network for Change development days bringing together third sector and statutory partners to develop their key themes and requirements for the poverty plan.
- 3 Poverty self-assessment sessions (and an online survey) identifying areas for improvement in the partnership approach to tackling poverty.
- Thematic sessions on gender, climate change, childcare, crisis support and transport.
- The Working for Change Collective conversation cafes at which people with lived experience of poverty were encouraged to feed into the process.
- Online consultation exercise with in-person workshops.

For any questions on the plan please contact Lucy Higginson, lhigginson@eastlothian.gov.uk

