



LIVINGSTON SOUTH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

ANTI-POVERTY SERVICE UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to inform the Local Area Committee of the work undertaken by the Anti-Poverty Service from April 2018-March 2019.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the committee notes:

1. The Anti-Poverty Service provision in the ward; and,
2. The impact provision is having in terms of supporting the outcomes of the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018 to 23.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	None.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	The activity contained in the report contributes to service KPIs.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	<p>We are better educated and have access to increased and better quality learning and employment opportunities.</p> <p>We live longer, healthier lives and have reduced health inequalities.</p> <p>We have tackled significant inequalities in West Lothian society.</p>

VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	Activities delivered from approved budgets supplemented by external funding from Macmillan Cancer Support, European Social Fund and Scottish Legal Aid Board.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	None.
VIII	Other consultations	None.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

The Anti-Poverty Service provides services to help the most vulnerable households in West Lothian. The service contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan priority "Minimising poverty, the cycle of deprivation and promoting equality" by providing comprehensive advice, support and assistance to people in West Lothian who are:

- Without work or in low paid work
- Are poor and / or fuel poor
- Have money / debt issues
- Have been affected by cancer or other long term conditions
- In crisis
- In receipt of benefits and /or have an entitlement to payments managed by the service
- Being assessed for social care services

The service aims to help these groups increase their disposable income, manage their debt, improve their budgeting skills, to remain in their home and to appeal decisions made by the Department of Work and Pensions. The service also utilises the skills and knowledge of volunteers who provide a valuable role in supporting customers to access services and provide a listening ear which can offer a network of support and information.

The service is responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit, the Council Tax reduction scheme and the Scottish Welfare Fund. It also has the responsibility of administering and improving the uptake of free school meals, school clothing grant, education maintenance allowance and blue badges. It provides a front line service to recipients of benefits, which includes processing claims, assessing benefits, processing discretionary housing payments as well as other payments to claimants.

All activity across the service is informed and prioritised by the Community Planning Partnership Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018 to 2023. The overall purpose of this strategy is to reduce the inequalities gap and tackle the causes of inequality to ensure that people are not financially excluded and minimises the impact of poverty on the people of West Lothian.

D2 Provision

Over the past year the service has:

- Given 14,355 individuals advice and support resulting in 38,793 separate enquiries covering money and debt, energy, housing and welfare benefits.
- Maximised Income by over £27.3 million in benefits and supported 532 customers to appeal decisions made by the Department for Work and

Pension which they think are wrong, 74% of cases were successfully appealed

- Managed £8.4 million debt of which 79% was successfully managed.
- Processed 2,405 new benefit claims in 11 days and 37,009 changes of circumstances in 4 days; West Lothian is one of the top performing benefits teams in Scotland.
- Undertaken 10,735 Scottish Welfare Fund applications for both crisis grants and community care grants and administered £1,081,145 budget.

Non Residential Care Contribution Policy

Since the policy was introduced in October 2018 the service has carried out 1,580 financial assessments offering support and advice at every stage of the process. Advisers have increased income by over £1.7million through accessing additional benefits and providing support with over 1800 separate enquiries across the full range of advice the service provides.

The service has supported customers to understand the policy and their contribution towards care costs. Customers have been supported to request a review if they felt their personal circumstances meant they had additional disability related expenses or were facing financial hardship. There have been over 100 reviews of which 56% were successfully changed.

The Anti-Poverty Service developed and delivered training to over 100 Social Policy staff and implemented a new internal referral process to ensure that partners have the knowledge and ability to refer customers at the earliest possible point. There has also been training delivered to external organisations and partners to increase understanding around the financial assessment process and further highlight support available to individuals.

We continue to embed services into the local community and to support customers to help mitigate poverty, to enable and empower people and work collaboratively with partners to maximise the benefits of our service at a customer's time of need.

The service successfully achieved Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers at level I, II and III for Welfare Benefits, Money/Debt and Housing Advice and has been awarded two quality assurance standards for volunteering: Macmillan volunteer Quality Standard and Volunteer Scotland Volunteer Friendly Standard.

D3 Livingston South

Appendix one shows the number of people the Anti-Poverty service has worked with over the last year in the Livingston South area and further information on the Anti-Poverty Service.

The Advice Shop has helped 1,660 customers to manage their money and to resolve benefit problems within the Livingston South ward. This is an increase of 10% compared to 2017-18 and is a result of the weekly sessions held at Arrochar House and the continued presence of the Advice @ St John's service within the hospital. This resulted in 3,597 customer contacts and 4,408 separate enquiry types. As a result, customers better understand that claimants and benefit administrators have rights, obligations and constraints and have some idea what these are. Customers know how to take the steps they can to sort out their benefit queries and are able to maximise their household income.

Arrochar House

This session offers customers around 600 appointments each year to access the Advice Shop service within the Livingston South ward. A dedicated advisor attends Arrochar House twice weekly to ensure customers have the opportunity to access support within their local community.

Advice @ St John's

The Advice @ St John's Project was developed in partnership with NHS Lothian, West Lothian Council Advice Shop and West Lothian Citizens Bureau. Through combining our expertise and resources, it has ensured the best possible support is available for patients, families and carers who are attending St John's Hospital. The project has supported over 1,400 customers generating more than £1.5 million in extra income. The project recognises that what everyone needs is a friendly face, someone who can spend time and listen to what is worrying you. Volunteers play a vital role providing that 'listening ear' along with a wealth of knowledge and understanding.

The Anti-Poverty Service has identified the following priorities for development over the 2019/20 year. Namely, to;

- Develop and embed new software to improve processing timescales for Blue Badges.
- Work with partners to mitigate the effects of the full roll out of Universal Credit which commenced in May 2018.
- Digitalisation of areas of the service, improving efficiencies and offering more choice to customers at a time which suits them.
- Implement a new referral system to allow internal and external services and organisations to easily refer customers ensuring customers receive the support required at the earliest point.
- Work with Housing, Customer and Building Services to implement the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan particularly focussing on prevention and early intervention.
- Undertake a review of the Scottish Welfare Fund which will include looking at ways of making it easier for individuals to collect awards.
- Continue to provide advice and advocacy to customers who are in receipt of non-residential care and streamline the assessment process by transferring to a software solution.
- Work with colleagues in Education to develop and embed processes to improve uptake on Free School Meals and Milk, Clothing Grants and Education Maintenance Allowance.

E. CONCLUSION

The report and attached appendix summarise the work of the Anti-Poverty service in the Livingston South ward area and an overview of the service as a whole. The Local Area Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and to consider how the service could better target its resources in this area. It is the intention to report on activity in the ward area on an annual basis.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

West Lothian Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018 to 2023

Appendices/Attachments:

Appendix 1: Livingston South Ward Profile Report April 2018-March 2019

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