

# WEST LOTHIAN: Surge in Advice Shop customers

The impact of the cost of living crisis has seen a huge rise in the numbers of people looking for advice and help on securing benefits.

West Lothian's Advice shops saw a 22% increase on last year. The council-run service dealt with 178,000 individual contacts handing out advice and help on securing benefits.

The figures were revealed as Advice Shop staff were joined by councillors to promote the service on the back of the revelation that across the UK £15 billion of benefits goes unclaimed in a year.

The number of contacts and enquiries to Advice shop staff jumped by almost a quarter over the 2021 figures, which had been climbing steadily since Covid and, in the months before pandemic, the roll-out of Universal Credit.

The team helped support more than 15,300 individual customers.

The [Advice Shops](#) are part of the council Anti-Poverty Service which works with agencies across the county helping with services such as food aid and financial help for those in fuel poverty.

Last year they helped people secure over £25 million in benefits.

The team can help local people find out what benefits they are

entitled to, and ensure that they are not missing out on support, and the service is free, impartial and confidential.

Depute Council Leader Kirsteen Sullivan said: “The cost of living is affecting many people and it’s very important that those that are entitled to benefits ensure that they are receiving them.

“Benefits exist to help people who need that extra support and it’s clear through our work that many people don’t realise that they are entitled to that additional support.

“£15 billion of benefits are going unclaimed across the UK and a significant proportion of those missing out will stay in West Lothian.

“I’d urge local people to contact us as quickly as possible and arrange for a benefits check. It can be done online, over the phone or in person and it doesn’t take long to do.”

Customers can use the online benefit calculator which can be found here: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/benefit-calculator>

*by Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter*

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