

Use of foodbanks up 99 percent in East Lothian

East Lothian Foodbank has become the fifth most used foodbank in Scotland with demand rising by 99 per cent over the last three years.

A report presented to East Lothian Council this week revealed that more than one in five children in the county now live in relative poverty with 393 households in temporary accommodation including 150 children and more than 1900 pensioners claiming pension credit.

The increase in the use of foodbanks was described as 'abhorrent' by Councillor Lee-Anne Menzies who said the county suffered from vast inequality between people with 'massive houses and endless income' and those who were homeless.

She said: "The level of welfare in the UK at the moment is abhorrent. It is not giving people enough to live on and we have now come to accept the use of a foodbank is something that is normal in people lives. It shouldn't be.

"If someone isn't working or is in a low paid job it shouldn't be something that is used to make up the shortfall while employers get massive profits. That is again abhorrent and needs to be tackled on a national level."

Councillors approved a new East Lothian Poverty Plan to tackle the issue across the county over the next four years which included as key areas ensuring people can access jobs with fair wages and the benefits they are entitled to with claims millions of pounds are not claimed each year.

It also included the pledge that poverty is everybody's concern.

Council leader Norman Hampshire said the increase in poverty across East Lothian had been impacted by the cost of living crisis.

He said: "All of us as councillors will come across families who are suffering in poverty.

"The best way to solve someone living in poverty is to get them into a job that provides them with a fair wage to live a normal life or ensure they have access to benefits that are at a level that let them live a normal life."

During the meeting tributes were paid to East Lothian campaigner Sean Crawford who was instrumental in the new plan which was described as 'his legacy'.

Haddington dad Sean, who died earlier this year at the age of 37, co-founded the Working for Change collective and was involved with a number of organisations committed to making a difference in people's lives.

And as officers presented a report on their new East Lothian Poverty Plan his commitment to the issue was remembered by elected members.

Councillor Lyn Jardine said: "Sean was a driving force behind the Working for Change collective. One thing he was very clear of was that unless you have had some experience of poverty yourself or someone close to you you might not necessarily have it on your radar."

And East Lothian Provost John McMillan described Sean as a "big guy with a big heart who will be sadly missed."

Council policy officer Lucy Higginson told the meeting: "This poverty plan is a part of Sean's legacy and he was really instrumental in having difficult conversations and encouraging

people to make their voices heard.”

Councillor Menzies added: “Sean is sadly missed and will be missed for a long time to come. His work with Change and in other areas has brought this issue to the fore and he was always encouraging us to be brave and have the conversations no-one wants to have.

“I will take up that mantle on his behalf and encourage everyone of us to take that mantle on his behalf.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter