

West Lothian Council recognises Care Experienced as a protected characteristic

West Lothian Council will add its support to a growing national scheme which aims to improve life chances for people who have lived in care.

A motion to recognise Care Experienced as a protected characteristic was agreed by the full council.

The decision means that council policies will now consider the experience of care when forming policies, recognising the need to help level up the life chances of youngsters who grew up in care.

West Lothian already has a pro-active record in working with young people with care and has now developed policies which help those transferring to adulthood, looking at services, and signposting continuing help that may be needed.

Research has shown that those who grow up in care can face a variety of difficulties through no fault of their own.

A motion proposed by Independent Councillor Andrew McGuire and seconded by Lib Dem Sally Pattle highlighted stark differences in life chances; from homelessness to unemployment right down to whether they can access the internet at home

Care Experienced people are more than twice as likely to have experienced homelessness and more likely to earn three quarters of the salaries of their peers.

They are over three times as likely to have not had a full-time job by age 26 and almost twice as likely to have no internet at home.

The findings of the Independent Care Review carried out in 2020 led to the setting up of the Promise Scotland Team to ensure that “care experienced children would grow up loved, safe and respected.”

A key recommendation to ensure children and young people reach their full potential is to ensure that Care Experienced is a protected characteristic. Since 2023, three local authorities – Falkirk, Stirling, Edinburgh – have joined 55 other organisations in Scotland in signing up.

Councillor McGuire told the meeting: “I hope this goes through without any contention whatsoever because I think it’s a vitally important step forward for Care Experienced people.

“Care Experienced people have different life chances than other people and all the motion seeks to do is try and address some of this through some procedures that the council has.”

Councillor Pattle said: “ I think the facts in this motion speak for themselves. So for these reasons and more there is now a national movement working towards Care Experienced being recognised as a protected characteristic across the UK to help everyone who identifies as Care Experienced to reach their full potential.”

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter