

Thousands of West Lothian residents seek help in poverty awareness week

Almost half the population of West Lothian sought information and help with financial problems during a recent week of action.

The Challenge Poverty Week in West Lothian saw close to 90,000 people accessed a range of events.

The annual event in which the council is joined by community planning partners and outside agencies offers advice on services ahead of the winter months.

First introduced in 2013 the event organised by The Poverty Alliance is an initiative aimed at raising awareness about poverty and its impact and promoting solutions to tackle it.

The council's online services and social media are increasingly being developed to open doors to advice and information. It provides a platform for individuals, communities and organisations from the more than 180,000 people who live in the county to come together and discuss ways to improve financial well-being.

In a report to the council's Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, the Nahid Hanif, the Anti-Poverty Service Manager said: "Annually, the Anti-Poverty Service leads on the development of a programme of events and engagement, delivered in partnership with Tackling

Poverty Partners and designed to showcase the different ways we can tackle poverty in West Lothian, and engage with the public to encourage self-referrals and take up of advice and support.

“Each year, the Poverty Alliance sets a number of themes to Challenge Poverty Week; for 2024, the week was split into 5 different daily themes of: Housing, Transport, Adequate Incomes, Food and Communities & Volunteers.”

Early feedback from the opening conference and subsequent seminars and information days has been positive, Ms Hanif added.

Data compiled by the council shows there were 86,207 interactions with events online over the week in early October. The largest interaction online came from the Poverty and Trauma conference which attracted 16,421 impressions.

The report said: “The conference, which had 65 delegates from a range of organisations in attendance, was opened by Councillor Andrew McGuire and included a keynote speech delivered by the West Lothian Trauma Champion, Pauline Cochrane; a very well received lived experience account by Jinty Dobson who now works as a Peer Navigator, supporting students at West Lothian College; and rounded off with a choice of three themed workshops where delegates could discuss and explore practical solutions to supporting trauma experienced individuals.”

Feedback comments included: ‘Once again... a fantastic and informative event’; ‘The lived experience was particularly inspiring’ and ‘A really positive outlook on partnership supports is what I found most beneficial’.

The report also highlighted how the council and other agencies are developing online advice platforms to widen access to services.

Ms Hanif said: "Other online presence included a remote, online advice clinic delivered through the Attend Anywhere platform; daily social media posts; and an online Ask the Adviser Session which was particularly successful at raising awareness and engaging the local community, with a final reach of over 20,000 and almost 200 interactions (151 comments, 19 shares, 2 saves and 24 reactions). The Ask the Adviser Session also received 12 contacts from customers through Direct Messenger on Facebook and via email. "

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter