

# **Advice Shop looks to expand Outreach services**

**West Lothian's anti-poverty service has secured around £3 million worth of help for the people of Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley in the last year.**

The levels of debt, and the need for emergency food and fuel vouchers highlighted the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on poor households even in a mild winter.

Almost 800 vouchers were issued in the ward, which covers villages in the area stretching from Fauldhouse to the western fringe of Livingston including Stoneyburn and Addiewell.

A spokesperson for the anti-poverty service said that it was recognised that more outreach sessions were needed in smaller communities, admitting they were not getting the numbers "that we should be," according to data.

Councillors on the Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Local Area Committee heard that anti-poverty service staff had issued 418 emergency food vouchers and 361 fuel vouchers for households at risk of disconnection in the last year.

The council-run service had secured financial gains of £2,028,416 million by maximising income from social security benefits in the ward over the last year.

The service delivered energy efficiency savings of £72,425 through access to financial support and advice.

It offered support to deal with £842,055 of problem debt resulting in reduction in debt repayments of £434,009.

In total, 11% of Advice Shop customers in West Lothian come from the Fauldhouse and Breich Valley area. Across West Lothian over £27m in benefits changes and £600,000 in energy savings have been delivered over the year.

There is only one Outreach centre, once a week in Fauldhouse but the team is looking to develop the service.

Councillor Cathy Muldoon said "It was good to see the numbers in relation to the Outreach are there any plans for more Outreach probably in Stoneyburn and Addiewell."

People can contact the service by phone, and organise telephone call backs, but it is looking to develop more Outreach services to help struggling families especially in relation to the take up of education benefits.

The spokesperson added: " Stoneyburn was one area where we were expecting there to be higher take up of education benefit. So, we're looking to see where we are not getting customers from, and we should be"

Chairing the meeting Councillor Craig Meek said: "Its great to see the support that is available to people West Lothian. Our Advice Shop is one of the best I would say, and I have signposted many people towards it I think it's important to make sure these services are accessible as possible so it's great to hear that you are looking to try and expand that Outreach."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter