



DRAFT
East Lothian
Poverty Plan
2021-2023

SUMMARY
JULY 2021





Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.

Nelson Mandela

East Lothian Council established the East Lothian Poverty Commission in October 2015 to report on how the Council and East Lothian Partnership could reduce inequalities and poverty. The Commission's final report included 56 recommendations, which were turned into a Poverty Action Plan 2017 - 2020.

Both the Council and the East Lothian Partnership adopted the Action Plan and embedded a strong commitment to tackling poverty and inequality into their plans in order to **'tackle the causes and effects of poverty in East Lothian and reduce the gap between the richest and poorest people.'**

In March 2020 the East Lothian Partnership established a multi-agency Poverty Working Group to review progress with the Poverty Action Plan and develop a new draft East Lothian Poverty Plan, taking into account the impact of COVID. The group includes representatives from key council services including, Education and Children's Services, Connected Communities, and Revenues and Benefits, along with the Health & Social Care Partnership, NHS Lothian and the third sector including Voluntary Centre East Lothian and the two East Lothian CABx.

The working group's review of progress with the 2017-2020 Poverty Action Plan showed that many actions have been fully achieved and significant progress made against most of the other actions.

Both these action plans have substantially been completed but much still needs to be done since poverty has increased as a result of the COVID pandemic which has had devastating consequences on our economy, society, health. The following statistics provide a summary of the significant negative impact the pandemic has had on East Lothian – the number of East Lothian residents claiming Universal Credit doubled from February 2020 to May 2020 and at the height of the pandemic over 7,500 East Lothian residents were 'furloughed' from their job.

Tackling poverty through the Covid pandemic

The quotes highlighted in this paper were recorded by the Poverty Commission when it spoke to people experiencing poverty in 2016. They are just as relevant now, as the pandemic lockdown has disproportionately affected people in poverty and created more poverty.



Kids can't learn when they're hungry

Teacher, Haddington

Throughout the pandemic supporting individuals and communities that faced financial and food insecurity and growing levels of poverty has been a key priority for the council and all our partners.

Additional funding was made available from the Scottish Government to extend Free School Meal provision over the Summer, mid-term, Christmas and Easter holidays and to make £100 hardship payments during these periods for every child in receipt of Free School Meals.

The council also received funding from the Scottish Government during 2020 to support people self-isolating under Test and Protect and families, and households who were vulnerable for other reasons or experiencing financial insecurity because of COVID-19. This additional funding was used in innovative ways to have maximum effect in supporting vulnerable people and people in poverty.

The majority of the new funding was allocated to the six Area Partnerships to support the massive community effort to provide meals, food and other supplies to people who were shielding and the increasing number of people who were facing severe financial difficulty because of losing their jobs or reduced income due to being furloughed.



I go around the supermarket looking for food that will fill up my bairns. Instant noodles cost 9p and little to cook. I can feed my family for a week on the price of one packet of grapes.

Dad, Prestonpans

Examples of how this funding has been used include:

- Prioritising food projects by creating food pantries; supporting Community Kitchens; the provision of meals, or soup and sandwich to hundreds of families and pensioners throughout 2020/21. A Fareshare Hub was established to provide food supplies for over a dozen community food initiatives across East Lothian.
- A new Fuel Poverty Fund was created to help households who were struggling to afford to heat their homes and keep the lights turned on. Almost 600 one-off payments of £100 were paid to people who needed help with their gas or electricity bills.
- Additional funding was provided to assist tenants who were experiencing new or increased rent arrears because of financial difficulties caused by the pandemic.
- Children's Services was given funding to support families and young people through emergency payments, and supplementing the income of, and paying the cost of temporary accommodation for, Looked After Young People.
- Adult Social Work provided additional funding to third sector partners including Carers of East Lothian to support vulnerable clients in financial difficulty.

Just over £1m Scottish Government funding for financial insecurity and to support people adversely affected by the pandemic lockdown has been carried forward into 2021/22. This 'one-off' COVID funding is being used in line with the guidance from the Scottish Government to continue to support individuals and families at financial risk due to the impact of COVID, along the same lines as in the last year.

The Draft Poverty Plan

The Draft East Lothian Poverty Plan for 2021-2023 is based around seven themes and outcomes that were drawn from the Poverty Commission's report:



These themes are also aligned to the strategic goals set in the 2017-2022 Council Plan, which will support the aim of reducing poverty:

- Reduce unemployment and improve the employability of East Lothian’s workforce
- Reduce the attainment gap and raise the attainment and achievement of our children and young people
- Improve the life chances of the most vulnerable people in our society
- Extend community engagement and decision making and increase community and individual resilience
- Deliver transformational change and harness the opportunities that technology offers in the provision of services.

Addressing Climate Change and taking action to meet the zero emission target has not been included as a specific objective in the Plan but it is a key driver of the Council Plan and East Lothian Plan. Several of the actions in the Plan, such as reducing fuel poverty and tackling digital exclusion will have a significant positive impact in addressing climate change and help East Lothian meet the net zero emission target.



It’s hard to even think about what the next few weeks will be like. I keep getting letters about rent and council tax arrears but I put them in the drawer. I need to feed my baby before I pay my rent.

Young mum claiming Universal Credit

The main part of the Draft Poverty Plan is the Action Plan. This sets out 49 objectives/ actions with a short description of the work already being undertaken by the council and partners, and further actions that should be prioritised over the next two years.

KEY THEMES/ OUTCOMES

1

In work and not in poverty:
free from in-work poverty

2

Financially included:
access to benefits and free from debt

3

Having a home:
a decent, affordable, warm and dry home

4

Educated:
all children and young people can reach their goal

5

Healthy and well:
health inequalities are eliminated

6

Connected:
with your community and to the internet

7

Empowered and responsible:
citizens and communities are empowered to influence policy and the council takes responsibility to reduce poverty

1 In work and not in poverty:

free from in-work poverty

The Draft Plan is based on the need to create more jobs and more better paid jobs in East Lothian to reduce unemployment and in-work poverty. The 10 actions under this outcome are based around implementing the Economic Development Strategy, the City Region Deal, and the Developing the Young Workforce Plan.

These actions include:

- Attract good quality jobs into the area, providing opportunities for career progression and in work training to ensure longer-term benefit for both employees and the local economy.
- East Lothian should become a 'Living Wage' area and the council and its public sector partners should lead this process by achieving Scottish Living Wage Accreditation.
- East Lothian Works should develop a focused project to improve skills, confidence and opportunities for parents funding to allow them to return to work or education
- Implement Developing Scotland's Young Workforce plan for East Lothian and work with the business community and other partners to provide more support for skills development, focusing on those further from the labour market.

2 Financially included:

access to benefits and free from debt

There are eight actions under this outcome aiming to ensure that people who do need financial support through benefits get advice and support and can access the benefits they are entitled to.

Actions under this outcome include:

- Enhance the impact of independent advice services by improved targeting of income maximisation checks and debt and money advice for those who are most vulnerable
- Maximise the uptake of new Scottish Security benefits
- Address the causes of food poverty/ insecurity
- Tackle 'period poverty' by ensuring access to a choice of period products for those who need them.



People don't understand what circumstances some people are in. A lot of people are poor or very close to it. We need to pay more attention to poverty.

Young person, Musselburgh

3 Having a home:

a decent, affordable, warm and dry home

The seven actions under this outcome are based on the Local Housing Strategy including:

- Increase supply and range of affordable housing options
- Increase supply of appropriate temporary accommodation to reduce the reliance on B&B accommodation and provide improved long-term outcomes for those who find themselves homeless
- Reduce Fuel Poverty and increase the awareness and uptake of energy efficiency advice across all tenures.

4 Educated:

all children and young people can reach their goal

There are eight actions under this outcome which aim to contribute to the aim of reducing inequalities in schools and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. These include:

- Develop clear policies to reduce inequality in schools, and develop a whole school approach to raising awareness of the impact of poverty on education and what education can do to mitigate the cycle of poverty
- Schools need to work towards reducing the attainment gap with a real understanding of the way in which poverty affects attainment
- Expand efforts to address food insecurity and morning hunger for children and young people to improve their educational attainment and overall wellbeing.

5 Healthy and well:

health inequalities are eliminated

The six actions in this outcome mainly relate to priorities that are already part of the Integration Joint Board's (Health & Social Care Partnership) Strategic Plan and the Children's Services Plan, with the overall aim of reducing health inequalities. They include actions to:

- Improve access to adult mental health services
- Improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- Tackle the growing problem of social isolation.

6 Connected:

with your community and to the internet

This outcome has four actions:

- All sectors and communities work in partnership to tackle poverty and the causes of poverty
- Address the Digital Divide
- Develop a more integrated travel solutions that better meet local need, particularly in more rural areas.



When I was very ill, subsisting on benefits and unable to afford more than a basic diet, I actually couldn't have afforded the travel from North Berwick to the nearest foodbank.

Individual, North Berwick

7 Empowered and responsible:

citizens and communities are empowered to influence policy and the council takes responsibility to reduce poverty



Poverty is not inevitable. Nor is it just about finances. It can be about an inability to fully participate in society because of a lack of opportunity. Poverty can be debilitating. It can strip confidence, self-worth and passion.

Poverty Commission member

This important outcome has six actions which aim to keep tackling poverty at the heart of policy making.

These include:

- Ensure people with lived experience of poverty and inequality have an input into the development and monitoring of policies and actions aiming to reduce poverty and inequality
- East Lothian Council and the East Lothian Partnership will continue their strong commitment to tackling poverty and inequality as a core ambition.
- Commitment to Community Empowerment to enable further involvement of local communities including the development of Participatory Budgeting
- Ensure that the voices of those experiencing disadvantage are included within Area Partnerships so that they are informed by a sound understanding of poverty and inequality.

What next?

Consultation on the draft Poverty Plan will take place through August and September 2021.

The consultation will include hearing from communities and people, including care experienced young people who are living with and experiencing poverty

A revised and final draft of the 2021-2023 Poverty Plan, taking on board the comments and views expressed during the consultation, will be brought to the Council and East Lothian Partnership for approval in Autumn 2021. The final Plan will include a detailed action plan as well indicators and targets against which progress will be measured and reported through 2022 and 2023.



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