

# Housing Information and Advice

You are entitled to advice whether you are a council tenant, an owner/occupier, a lodger, living at home, privately renting, a Housing Association tenant or even a landlord.

We can help you get general financial, housing or legal advice where appropriate. We can also give general housing advice and assistance. Please contact us if you would like information or advice on any housing problem including:

- Homelessness/homelessness prevention
- Your housing options
- Information and advice on managing debt
- Mortgage arrears
- Rent arrears
- Repairs and improvement grants
- Disrepair
- Housing Benefit/other benefit entitlements
- Discrimination or harassment
- Relationship breakdown and your housing rights/options
- Help to allow you to stay in your own home, such as support,
- Equipment or adaptations
- Your rights with respect to the legal process of eviction
- Mortgagees' rights under the Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act
- 2001 and Mortgage to Let Schemes

## What help is available?

Sometimes all that is needed is an explanation of services that are available and how to access them.

In more complicated situations you may need to speak to someone in depth about your housing problem, to enable them to help you.

This will usually involve a confidential interview with a Housing Needs Officer or a specialist adviser. You will be interviewed in private to discuss your situation, but you can bring someone with you to the interview if you want to. Home visits can be arranged by appointment if you are unable to get to one of our offices.

## Where can I get information & advice?

Get information and advice about any housing issue or problem by:

- Visiting your Local Council Office
- Phoning the Customer Service Centre (24/7)
- E-mail [customer.care@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:customer.care@westlothian.gov.uk)
- Going online to: [www.westlothian.gov.uk](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk) and click on 'Housing'

## Independent advice

You can get independent advice from the council's Advice Shop. This free service has specialist advisors who can assist you with Welfare Benefits, Housing & Energy advice and Money Advice.

These advisors will help you to claim any Welfare Benefits you are entitled to, negotiate with landlords, mortgage lenders and creditors on your behalf, or provide you with advice or assistance on energy and its domestic uses, any grants available and billing issues.

Simply pop along to the Advice Shop at the Bathgate partnership or call 01506 283000.

## Advice Shop opening hours

8:30am – 5:00pm Monday through Thursday  
8:30am – 4:00pm Fridays

On occasion we may be able to assist you find independent mediation provider. This can sometimes be a helpful way of dealing with an issue; this involves a mediator (someone who does not take sides, but whose job is to help both parties find a solution to the problem). The parties in dispute, and not the mediator, decide what will happen in terms of any agreement made.



Tel: 01506 280000

Email: [customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk)

## Benefit health checks

If you are

- Confused by the range of benefits on offer?
- Daunted by the claims process?
- Unsure if you're receiving correct benefits

The Council offers you the chance to find out everything you need to know about your entitlement to welfare, in the form of a free and completely confidential Benefits Healthcheck.

This service will tell you about every benefit available to you in one contact – there's no need to go chasing around different agencies for information. In short, it is a unique opportunity to get a complete check of your full eligibility for benefits.

If you are interested in the service, you'll be offered a private appointment, which will take around 20 minutes, with a benefits expert from the Advice Shop. Your advisor will ask a few simple questions about your circumstances and from this will be able to tell you about any extra income you may be entitled to.

For the appointment it would be helpful if you could bring your:

- benefits books
- wage slips
- details of rent and details of council tax
- any other financial details you think might be relevant, e.g. details of savings

If you are interested in this service contact your local office for an appointment with a specialist adviser or call 01506 283000 and we will either collect the information by phone or arrange for someone to call at your home.

## Energy Advice

West Lothian Council Energy Advice offers free, confidential and impartial advice on all fuel related issues, to all residents of West Lothian whether they are council or private tenants or homeowners. We can deal with a variety of issues including: new tenant advice, heating use, payment methods, cutting down your fuel bills, insulation measures, billing problems and energy efficiency grants.

We can negotiate on your behalf with your fuel supplier and if you have been caught by surprise with a large fuel bill, we can help arrange suitable payment plans and/or investigate the cause for you.

We are also available to give talks and training to community groups and organisations on all domestic fuel related issues and can also carry out home visits.

Based at the **Advice Shop** in Bathgate we are open for you to visit during the following opening hours:

9.00am – 5.00pm Mon, Tues and Thursdays  
9.00am – 1.00pm Wednesdays  
9.00am – 4.00pm Fridays

We can be contacted on 0800 834 672 (free)

By email: [energy.advice@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:energy.advice@westlothian.gov.uk)

By letter:

West Lothian Energy Advice  
FREEPOST EH3217  
Bathgate, West Lothian, EH48 0BR

## Other organisations

You can also contact any of the following organisations for further information and advice:

<b>Shelter</b>	<a href="http://www.scotland.shelter.org.uk">http://www.scotland.shelter.org.uk</a>	0808 800 4444
<b>Citizens Advice Bureau/Citizens Advice Direct</b>	<a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk">www.citizensadvice.org.uk</a>	0844 848 9600
<b>National Debtline</b>	<a href="http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland">www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland</a>	0808 808 4000
<b>Money Advice Scotland</b>	<a href="http://www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk">www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk</a>	

You also have the option of consulting a local solicitor; their details are available in the local phonebook/yellow pages. The legal aid system in Scotland provides free or subsidised legal assistance for individuals who cannot afford to pay for it themselves. Advice and assistance may be provided by a solicitor on any matter of Scots Law, subject to a test for financial eligibility carried out by a solicitor. The Scottish Legal Aid board can provide more information about the legal aid system, for more details please check their website [www.slab.org.uk](http://www.slab.org.uk) or call their helpline 0845 122 8688.

Tel: 01506 280000

Email: [customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk)