

# Updated Poverty Profile of West Lothian – 2025

## 1. Introduction - West Lothian Poverty in Context

In 2025, the profile of West Lothian tells us that the demographics of poverty are changing. There are now fewer people claiming out of work benefits and more people in employment than when the first anti-poverty strategy was developed in 2012. Gross wage levels for West Lothian (workplace) are generally just below the Scottish levels. The exception to this is part-time employment where annual and weekly pay for both residents and within the local job market are higher.

Underemployment and insecure jobs continue to be key factors for the working age population creating potential for higher levels of 'in work poverty'.

Local unemployment is 2.7% of the general working age population. This rate is 0.4% below the Scottish average and 1.4% below the UK average. The tightening of labour supply and an ageing workforce can be seen as an opportunity for local people to retrain and up-skill.

The latest official child poverty data for Scotland shows that the majority of children living in poverty are in households where someone works.

The number of pensioners claiming means tested top-up benefit Pension Credit has noticeably decreased in West Lothian since 2012, and has continued to fall over the last five years. This may be due to lack of awareness of entitlement or reluctance to claim as there is an estimated £5 million unclaimed Pension Credit in West Lothian alone. There is some emerging evidence of increased post-retirement working due to cost of living pressures, however, retirees going back into the workforce has slowed down in 2024.

- 20% of the West Lothian population experience some form of financial hardship
- 5% are living in more extreme poverty
- 24.6% of children in West Lothian are living in poverty. Scottish average is 24%
- 70% of children in poverty live in working families
- 18% of West Lothian households are in fuel poverty. 9% of West Lothian households are in extreme fuel poverty. 34% of Scottish households are in fuel poverty in 2023
- 20% of Scotland's population were living in relative poverty after housing costs in 2021-24. Before housing costs, 18% of the population were living in poverty
- Unemployment is currently 2.7% of the general working age population and 4.4% for 18-24-year olds
- The West Lothian unemployment rate is 0.4% below the Scottish average and 1.4% below UK average
- 3,120 people in West Lothian are receiving Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit and are searching for work
- 0.72 jobs available per working age person
- 87,200 of West Lothian working age population (72.5%) are in employment
- Average weekly pay for full time employment is £721.90 or £38,195 per year (residents)
- Scottish averages FT are £740.00 weekly pay and £38,286 per year
- 14.5% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage
- West Lothian has 22 data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland
- 30,867 people in West Lothian receive state pension. 3,672 (11.9%) receive Pension Credit to ensure a minimum income, which is around the same as the Scottish rate (12.0%).

## 2. Economic Picture - Cost of Living Crisis

Many Scottish households are struggling financially. The Scottish Consumer Sentiment Indicator Survey's latest results for Q1 2025 shows respondents think the economy is performing worse than it was 12 months ago but expect the economy to be performing better in 12 months-time. Respondents consider their household financial security to be in a worse position, and consumers feel less relaxed about spending than 12 months ago. A recent report<sup>1</sup> shows that 52% of people have had to cut back on non-essential spending and 45% are saving less than usual.

Inflation decreased sharply in the first half of 2024; however, CPI rose to 2.3% in October 2024, and has remained above the Bank of England's target of 2% since. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 3.5% in the 12 months to April 2025, up from 2.6% in the 12 months to March 2025. The largest upwards contributions came from housing and household services, transport, and recreation and culture. Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) energy price caps increased again in April, which impacting on domestic and gas electricity prices. This is likely to keep inflation higher than the Bank of England's target rate of 2% well into the third quarter of this year.

Food inflation increased to 3.4% in April 2025, up from 3.0% in March 2025. Core inflation, excluding volatile energy and food prices increased to 3.8% in April 2025, up from 3.4% in March 2025. Owner occupiers' housing costs inflation decreased to 6.9% in April 2025, down from 7.2% in March 2025. – However, this remains up from 6.6% one year ago in April 2024.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has downgraded the UK's growth forecast by 0.5 percentage points in 2025, meaning the UK economy will grow by just 1.1%, down from 1.6% the IMF were predicting in January 2025. One of the reasons for this downgrade is due to the IMF upgrading its inflation expectations because of utility bill increases that took effect in April 2025, meaning higher inflation will lead to weaker household spending, which means lower economic growth. It upgraded its inflation forecast by 0.7 percentage points to 3.1% for 2025. Overall, the UK's growth forecast for 2025 is still higher than the Euro area (1.1% compared to 0.8%).

US President Donald Trump has introduced a 10% tax on goods for the vast majority of countries including the UK and a 25% global tariff on cars. Research<sup>2</sup> from the Institute for Public Policy Research has suggested more than 25,000 direct jobs in the UK manufacturing and car industry could be at risk as exports to the US are predicted to fall.

A report<sup>3</sup> from the Poverty Alliance shows more older people are finding themselves in the Private Rented Sector. 39% of older private renters live in poverty in Scotland, with more struggling to meet the cost of rising rents. Over one third (34%) of older private renters feel anxious about paying their rent and 28% have less than £200 disposable income per month after they pay rent. Half of older private renters live in fear of eviction.

According to the latest Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) Report – Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2024, rates of material deprivation rose substantially between 2019-20 and 2022-23, as more households reported being unable to afford all sorts of essentials. Working-age adults

<sup>1</sup> Understanding Scotland – Economy Tracker, February 2024

<sup>2</sup> Planes, trains and automobiles: How green transport can drive manufacturing growth in the UK, April 2025

<sup>3</sup> Homing in – Independent Age, February 2024

that reported being unable to adequately heat their home rose from 4% to 11% (1.8 million to 4.6 million). Increases were seen across all age groups and at all income levels. Increases in mortgage interest rates have been another feature of the cost of living crisis exerting pressure on households' incomes. UK Government DWP poverty statistics are adjusted to account for households' housing costs, including mortgage interest payments. But these are calculated on the assumption that all households have the same interest rate, ignoring the significant (and growing) variation in rates between households. In 2022-23, the average mortgage rate was around 2.3%, translating to interest payments of £240 per month for a household with a typical outstanding mortgage. But a tenth of all households have faced a mortgage interest rate of at least 4.7%, equivalent to £490 per month.

Results from ONS Opinions and Lifestyle March 2025 Survey estimated that 29% of UK respondents reported it was very or somewhat difficult to afford their rent or mortgage payment with 31% reporting their rent or mortgage had gone up in the last 6 months. 40% of respondents said that they were spending less on food to combat increases in the cost of living. In March 2025, 66% of respondents estimated that their cost of living had increased compared to the month before, with people over 70 estimating their cost of living had increased the most (74%).

There were signs of optimism when the energy price guarantee ended, that consumer bills would not be as high as originally expected. From April 2025, the energy price cap is set at £1,849, a 6.4% increase compared to the cap set for the previous quarter (£1,738). The price cap is around 66% higher than it was in winter 2021/22. However, domestic energy prices are forecast to fall in July 2025, after three consecutive increases in Ofgem's price cap. This would mean annual bills would fall by £166 a year (9%). Annual household energy costs increased by 54% between 2019 and 2022 (£1,820 to £2,810) and increased a further 12.1% between 2022 and 2023 (£2,810 to £3,150).

Average wages in the UK are continuing to outpace inflation. Growth in employees' average total pay (including bonuses) was 5.5% in the three months to March 2025, and 5.6% in regular pay (excluding bonuses). Adjusting for inflation (using CPIH) shows an increase in real terms pay growth, with regular pay increasing by 1.8% and total pay increasing by 1.7%. However, there is some concern that with employer national insurance contributions rising from 13.8% to 15% in April 2025, it will result in lower pay rises in the coming year.

In May 2025, the Bank of England reduced the Bank Rate by 0.25 percentage points, to 4.25%, reflecting the progress of lower inflation. Changes in global trade tariffs mean the outlook for inflation is particularly uncertain at the moment. Higher household energy bills and regulated prices are expected to keep headline inflation to around 3.4% - 3.5% during Q2 and Q3 2025, however, inflation is expected to fall back thereafter. BoE is continuing a gradual approach to removing monetary policy restraint, and will continue to monitor closely the risks of inflation persistence. Monetary policy will have to continue to remain restrictive for sufficiently long until the risks to inflation returning sustainably to the 2% target in the medium term have dissipated further, expected to return in the latter half of 2025. Business leaders have warned that the UK Government's £25bn increase in employers' national insurance contributions, and 6.7% rise in minimum wage could also stoke inflationary/employment pressures in the coming months.

It remains clear that mounting economic pressures from the last year in the form of higher energy costs and global uncertainty are continuing to challenge both the public and businesses alike.

### 3. Employment and Economic Activity

The population of working age in West Lothian of 116,171 has continued to increase and it is projected to increase by 8.2% up to 2033 (Scotland will increase by 1.8%). This does not take account of changes to the retirement age.

Latest estimates indicate that 87,200 or 72.5% of the working age population are in employment (compared to 74.5% for Scotland). Within this total there are 78,000 employees (64.8%) and 8,300 self-employed (6.8%). The latest estimated jobs density for West Lothian is 0.72 jobs available per working age person.

#### Unemployment

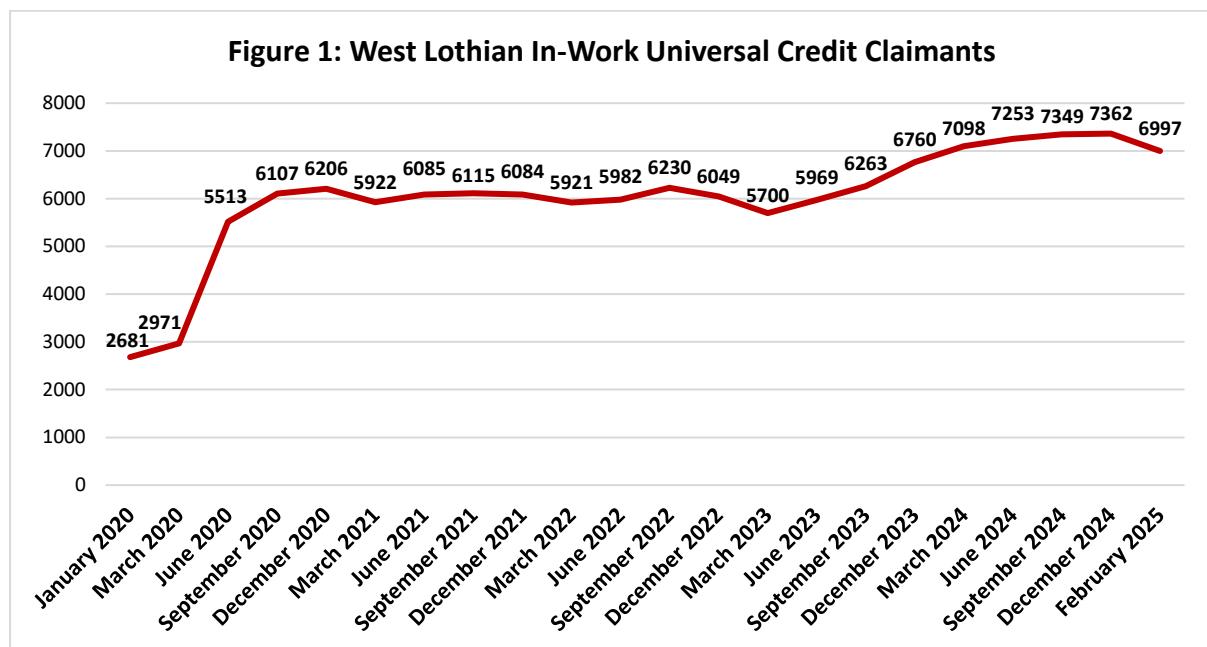
- The Headline Claimant Count based unemployment is currently 3,120 or 2.7% (April 2025)
- The Model based unemployment estimate is 3,300 (3.6%)
- The Youth unemployment level based on 18 to 24-year-olds claiming JSA and Universal Credit is 615 (4.4%) (April 2025).

<b>Table 1: Unemployment</b>				
	<b>West Lothian (numbers)</b>	<b>West Lothian (%)</b>	<b>Scotland (%)</b>	<b>Great Britain (%)</b>
<b>Claimant Count</b>	3,120	2.7	3.1	4.1
<b>Model based unemployment</b>	3,300	3.6	3.2	3.8
<b>Youth claimant count (18-24)</b>	615	4.4	4.3	5.6

Source: ONS/NOMIS

There is continued economic concern on the impacts of the cost of doing business crisis and the cost of living crisis. Job postings in Scotland decreased in February 2025 to 41,500, down from 44,000 in January 2025. Although, job postings increased compared to February 2024 (rising by 6% or 2,200 postings). The UK economy rebounded strongly in the first half of 2024, however, it barely grew between July and September, with uncertainty about the UK Government's Budget in October blamed for the weak growth. In early 2025, the economy (GDP) grew by 0.7% over the three-month period to March 2025. Current global trade policy developments are likely to reduce UK GDP growth; Business investment growth is also expected to be weak over the coming year. The Bank of England projects the overall UK unemployment rate to rise to 4.5% by the second half of 2025, and to gradually increase in the longer term to reach around 4.7% by the end of 2025.

## In-work claimants



Source: DWP, StatXplore

People who were in work but required financial support from Universal Credit (UC) as their income was not sufficient, has increased by 161% between January 2020 (2,681 claimants) and February 2025 (6,997). At February 2025, in-work claimants made up 6.0% of the West Lothian working age population. The Rate has increased from 5.8% in February 2024. The Level of in-work claims remained consistently high since the start of the Covid pandemic, plateauing at around 6,000 claimants until March 2023 when the level of claimants began to increase again. However, from January 2025, claimants have started to decrease. 8.1% of working age females were in-work UC claimants. 3.9% of working age males were in-work UC claimants. Wards with the highest in-work claimant rate were: Whitburn & Blackburn 1,148 (1%) and Livingston South 957 (0.8%)\*. Underemployment and insecure jobs are key factors for creating potential for higher levels of 'in work poverty'. The current Cost of Living crisis has seen increased inflation, with higher costs of food and energy, house mortgage and rent increases, and wage growth now slowing. Low earners are also much more likely to work volatile hours or have an insecure contract.

It is important to note that the migration of legacy benefits to Universal Credit have contributed to the historical rise in in-work UC claimants in the last year. The Universal Credit managed migration is now underway and it has been reported that around two-thirds of legacy benefit claimants across the UK who have received a managed migration notice have made a claim for Universal Credit. In West Lothian, the Move to Universal Credit programme started in September 2023 for tax credit only claimants and was expanded in April 2024 to claimants in receipt of Income Support. The programme has been rolled out further to people in receipt of other legacy benefits in a phased approach from July 2024 to September 2024, with an aim to have the exercise complete by the end of 2025.

In West Lothian, 3,136 people claimed Universal Credit after receiving a migration notice. Of those that claimed UC, 729 claimed before they needed a reminder, 502 people claimed after receiving one reminder and 1,901 people claimed after receiving multiple reminders. 841 people did not claim UC after being sent multiple reminders and had their legacy benefit closed.

\*Rates calculated on total number of claimants in each ward as a percentage of total resident working population of West Lothian.

### Working Age Economically Inactive

Table 2: Working Age Economically Inactive (Jan 2024-Dec 2024)				
	West Lothian (Numbers)	West Lothian (%)	Scotland (%)	Great Britain (%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	27,200	23.3	23.0	21.4
Student	5,500	20.3	23.8	27.0
Looking After Family/Home	5,200	19.1	16.1	18.5
Long-Term Sick	11,500	42.2	33.7	27.9
Retired	2,900	10.7	15.4	12.9
Wants A Job	5,800	21.5	16.8	18.3
Does Not Want A Job	21,400	78.5	83.2	81.7

Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey

During the latest ONS estimate for the year to December 2024, discounting those who have retired, around 24,300 were identified as economically inactive which translates to 21% of the working age population in West Lothian.

For those claiming Universal Credit, the largest increase seen over the past few years has been in the 'No work requirements' group, which comprises people who cannot do paid work due to health conditions or caring responsibilities. This group has increased significantly by 9,162 (415%) since the pre-Covid period (taken from January 2020). This group represents 53% of the total West Lothian UC caseload in March 2025.

The number of working-age adults who are out of the labour market, known as "economically inactive" because of long-term sickness, has been rising since 2019. This rise in long-term sickness started before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, but since the pandemic hit the UK in early 2020, the number of people out of work because of long-term sickness has risen significantly. While symptoms of long COVID may not be the only contributor to increased long-term sickness, the pandemic's wider impact on health is still likely to be an important factor. Nationally, the number reporting mental illness (including depression, bad nerves or anxiety) rose by 40% (386,000) between 2019-2023 according to the [Labour Force Survey](#)<sup>4</sup>. In Scotland, the number of calls made to NHS 24 for a mental health concern rose from 20,434 in 2019 to 139,008 in 2022, an increase of 580%.

[Results](#)<sup>5</sup> from the 2022 Scottish Census showed that the second most common health condition reported was a mental health condition. The percentage of people reporting a mental health condition increased from 4.4% (232,900) in 2011 to 11.3% (617,100) in 2022. This increase was the largest increase across condition types. The increase in the number of people reporting a mental health

<sup>4</sup> Rising ill-health and economic inactivity because of long-term sickness, UK: 2019 to 2023. Labour Force Survey, ONS

<sup>5</sup> Scotland's Census 2022 – Health, disability and unpaid care

condition was driven by a large increase among younger people. The largest increases were in the 16-24 age group with 15.4% reporting a mental health condition in 2022 compared to 2.5% in 2011.

Scotland Labour Market Insights for April 2025 show that “Long-term sick or disabled” was the main reason given for being inactive in Scotland. Latest estimates show that 33.7% of inactive people aged 16 to 64 gave their reason for being inactive as “long-term sick or disabled”. The proportion of people long-term sick or disabled had been gradually decreasing over time. However, since the Pandemic in 2020, it has been increasing in recent years for both Scotland and the UK.

Results from the [Scottish Health Survey](#) showed that there has been an overall increase in the proportion of adults reporting two or more symptoms of depression, rising from 8% in 2008/09 to 13% in 2021/22. The proportion of adults that reported having two or more symptoms of anxiety has increased from 9% in 2008/09 to 17% in 2021/22. The proportion of adults reporting two or more symptoms of depression tended to decrease with age. The lowest levels were recorded in adults aged 75 and over (7%) and the highest were recorded in adults aged 16-34 (32%) and 55-64 (16%). The prevalence of two or more symptoms of anxiety was highest among those aged 16-34 (26%) and lowest among those aged 65-74 (7%). For those with two or more symptoms of anxiety, the difference by sex was greatest amongst the 16-24 age group, at 13% of men and 33% of women.

Adults living in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as those in the least deprived areas (22% compared to 11%). Mental and behavioural disorders were the most prevalent health conditions recorded in government out-of-work benefits assessments. A [report](#)<sup>6</sup> by the Resolution Foundation shows that between January 2022 and November 2023 mental and behavioural disorders were recorded in 69% of all Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments (WCA).

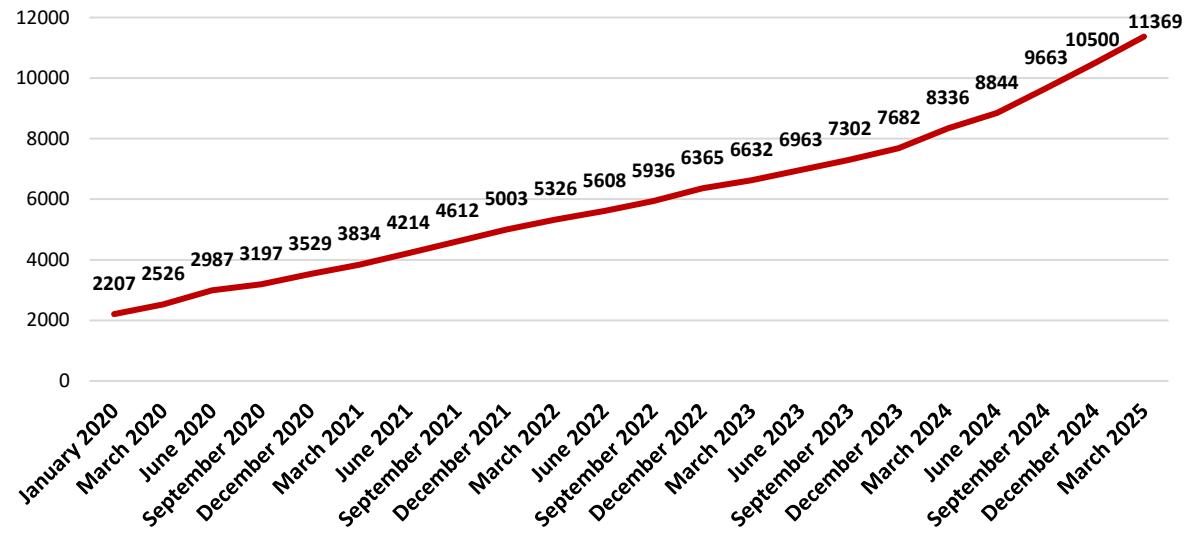
Other potential impacts resulting in economic inactivity, include increased [National Health Service \(NHS\) waiting times](#) and an ageing population and workforce: from age 50 onwards, [UK economic inactivity rates](#)<sup>7</sup> generally increase with age. In 2024, at age 50 the inactivity rate was 17.4%, and increased to 58.1% by age 65 years.

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<sup>6</sup> A U-Shaped Legacy – Resolution Foundation 2024

<sup>7</sup> Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, trends over time: 2024 – UK Gov, DWP

**Figure 2: West Lothian Universal Credit - No work requirements**



Source: DWP, StatXplore

### Low Income Employees

There is no breakdown of sub-groups of low pay employees at local authority level, however at UK level<sup>8</sup> it was established that:

- 4.5 million (one in six) UK jobs were low paid. This is up from 3.7 million (one in eight) jobs compared to the previous year.
- 53.6% of all jobs in the hospitality sector paid below the real Living Wage. This equates to 776,000 jobs.
- Nearly 2 in 5 workers paid below the real Living Wage used a foodbank within the last 12 months, with 28% relying on them at least once a month.
- In 2023/24, the disability pay gap was £2.35 per hour (17.2%). This is wider than the previous year, when it was £1.90 (14.6%).
- Median hourly pay for disabled women is £4.05 less than it is for non-disabled men.
- In 2024, part-time employees were over three times more likely to be low paid than full-time employees, with about 1 in 3 part time jobs being paid below the real Living Wage.
- Women were nearly 50% more likely to be low paid than men and 60% of low paid jobs were held by women.
- Around 70% of disabled employees earn less than £15 an hour.
- From April 2024, 21 and 22-year olds now receive the National Living Wage. However, the National Minimum Wage decreases for those under 21 years. Almost half (48.9%) of 16-21-year-olds are low paid employees.
- Median hourly pay is £8 for 16-17-year-olds and £10.90 for 18-21-year-olds.
- 40% of 18-24-year-olds with mental health problems who were in work were in low-paid jobs compared with their healthier peers (35%).
- Low-paid jobs are highest amongst sectors like hospitality (53.6%), wholesale and retail (30%) and arts, entertainment and recreation (29.2%). Hospitality has been the sector with the highest level of low paid jobs for 13 years.

<sup>8</sup> Employee jobs paid below the real living wage: 2024 – Living Wage Foundation, February 2025

At Scotland<sup>9</sup> level it was established that:

- Just over 10% of workers in Scotland are locked in persistent low-pay.
- Of those trapped in persistent low-pay, 72% are women. Given women are more likely to be in part-time employment, this helps to explain why a higher proportion of women are in low pay.
- By aged 22-23, low attainers are more likely to earn less (difference of £23.45 per week for men, £44.94 for women) and be in low-status jobs.
- A consistent finding on in-work poverty was the undervaluation of part-time work. Findings from Close the Gap (2022) showed a pay gap of 32.4% between women who work part-time and men who work full-time.
- Retail, hospitality, manufacturing, health and social work, and the administration and support services are the main industries maintaining in-work poverty. Nearly 75% of people experiencing in-work poverty and 80% of people locked in low pay have someone in their family who works in one of these industries.
- Couples with children make up around 50% of families experiencing in-work poverty.
- 43% of low-paid workers reported regularly using a food bank (at least once per month).
- 39% of low-paid workers were falling behind on household bills.

### **Zero Hour Contracts**

Zero-hour contracts i.e. contracts that do not guarantee a specific number of hours, are neither an indicator of a “good” nor a “bad” job, as different employees have different preferences for work arrangements. Again, there is no breakdown of sub-groups of zero-hour contracts at local authority level, however at UK level<sup>10</sup> it was established that:

- The average zero-hours contract worker earns about a third less (£10.68) than the median hourly rate of £15.69.
- On average, Women on zero-hours contracts earn nearly £10 less an hour compared to men not employed on zero-hour contracts.
- Women are 34% more likely than men to be on a zero-hours contract.
- BME women were 103% more likely than white men to be on a zero-hours contract.
- Disabled women were 49% more likely than white men to be on a zero-hours contract.
- Disabled employees were also more likely to be on zero-hour contracts (4.0%) than non-disabled employees (2.9%).
- Workers aged 16-24 were almost four times as likely than the wider work force to be employed on a zero-hours contract.
- Zero-hours contracts workers are more likely to get stuck in low pay and insecurity. 66% of workers have been with their current employer for over one year, 46% for over two years and 12% for over 10 years.
- Three in four (73.5%) of the record 1.1 million people (aged 16-65) currently on zero-hour contracts in the UK are in severely insecure work.
- Zero-hour contract workers in severely insecure work are most prevalent in hospitality (16.1%), arts, entertainment and leisure (6.9%) and admin and support services (3.5%).
- Finally, over half of employees on zero-hour contracts were in low pay (51%), whereas 16% of workers on non-zero-hour contracts were in low pay.

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<sup>9</sup> Poverty in Scotland 2023 – Joseph Rowntree Foundation

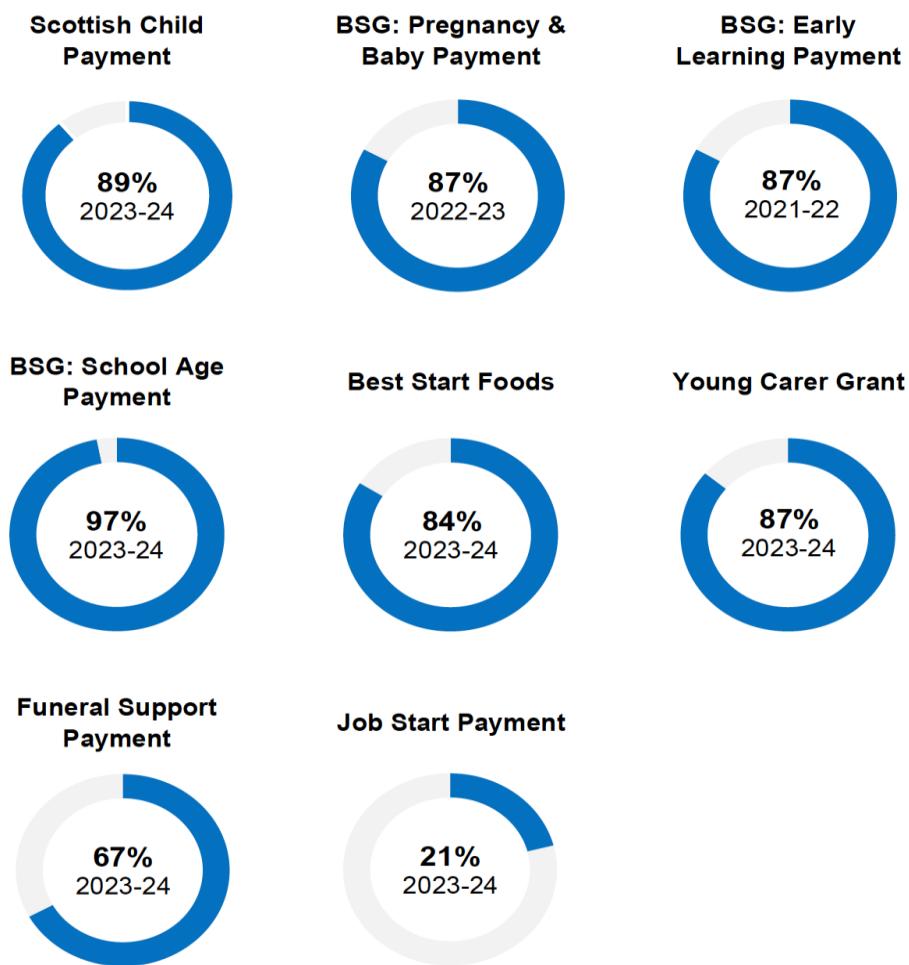
<sup>10</sup> People in employment on zero hours contracts – Labour Force Survey, ONS

#### 4. Unclaimed benefits

The UK Government's Department of Work and Pensions stopped publishing take-up rates for various benefits such as working age Housing Benefit, Income Support and income-related Employment and Support Allowances (with the exception of Pension age credit data) in January 2022.

However, the Scottish Government still undertakes estimates of the percentage take-up of Scottish benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland. While these indications are only available at Scottish level, they still provide some indication on levels of different benefits and support take up.

**Figure 3: Percentage take-up of Scottish benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland**



*Source: Scottish Government, Take-up rates of Scottish benefits: November 2024*

The estimated take-up rates for Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods – the 'Five Family Payments' – are generally higher than the other Scottish benefits. This could be because there are more opportunities to reach people eligible for the five family payments than the other Scottish benefits. For example, the Scottish Government's interim evaluations of Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods found clients learned about them through a variety of channels. Social Security Scotland proactively promotes the benefits through a range of online and offline channels. Clients are invited to make a combined application for all of the five family payments and their eligibility for each is then assessed. So, clients may apply for one of the five family payments, which then leads them to apply for the others they were previously unaware of, increasing take-up.

The estimated take-up rate for Young Carer Grant in 2023-24 is 87%, a substantial increase from last year's estimate of 75%. Successful applications to Young Carer Grant increased by around 50% between 2022-23 and 2023-24 while the estimated number of people eligible increased by around 30%.

21% of eligible young people took-up their entitlement to Job Start Payment in 2023-24. This has increased from last year where the take-up was estimated to be 15%. Despite this increase, Job Start Payment still has the lowest take-up rate of any Scottish benefit. A large number of people eligible for the payment are not applying for it and a large number of people who do apply for it are deemed not eligible. An evaluation of the payment suggested a number of possible reasons why take-up is low, including a lack of awareness of the benefit and its eligibility rules, and otherwise eligible applications being rejected due to clients' inability to provide suitable evidence of job offers. Social Security Scotland had implemented guidance changes to address the high application denial rates including redirecting those who don't meet the eligibility criteria to call Social Security Scotland and extending the application window from 3 months to 6 months.

Funeral Support Payment was claimed for two thirds (67%) of eligible deaths in 2023-24. The take-up rate has increased from an estimated 61% in the previous financial year (2022-23). While the number of people estimated to be eligible for Funeral Support Payment in 2023-24 was lower than the year before, a higher number of payments were made. There is a higher degree of uncertainty in the estimate of eligibility for Funeral Support Payment than other benefits so it is reasonable to expect variation in take-up rates year to year. Another potential reason why take-up of Funeral Support Payment is lower than other benefits is that people may make provision to cover funeral costs themselves, for example with money left in the deceased person's estate, and therefore choose not to claim the benefit. Some people may be ineligible due to the level of funds in the estate but are still included in the eligible population when calculating estimated take-up.

Ensuring that families can access all of the Scottish Social Security support to which they are entitled is a legal duty and fundamental priority of the Scottish Government. The second Benefit Take-up Strategy, published in October 2021, sets out how the Scottish Government is working to ensure people can access the support they are entitled to, and is built around five core principles.

1. Prioritising person-centred approaches
2. Communicating and engaging effectively
3. Bringing services to people
4. Encouraging cross-system collaboration
5. Continuously learning and improving

## 5. Pay and in-work poverty

<b>Table 3a: Earnings by place of residence</b>			
	<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>% difference</b>
Gross Annual pay - Full-time workers	£38,195	£38,286	-0.2%
Gross Annual pay - Part-time workers	£15,648	£14,864	5.3%
Gross Weekly pay - Full-time workers	£721.90	£740.00	-2.4%
Gross Weekly pay - Part-time workers	£290.70	£277.80	4.6%
Gross Hourly pay - Full-time workers	£18.98	£19.31	-1.7%
Gross Hourly pay - Part-time workers	£14.26	£14.00	1.9%

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2024

**Table 3b: Earnings by workplace**

	<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>% difference</b>
Gross Annual pay - Full-time workers	£35,645	£38,315	-7.0%
Gross Annual pay - Part-time workers	£16,518	£14,848	11.2%
Gross Weekly pay - Full-time workers	£681.40	£739.70	-7.9%
Gross Weekly pay - Part-time workers	£289.40	£276.80	4.6%
Gross Hourly pay - Full-time workers	£17.89	£19.26	-7.1%
Gross Hourly pay - Part-time workers	£13.17	£14.00	-5.9%

Source: *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2024*

Gross wage levels for West Lothian (workplace) are generally just below the Scottish levels. The exception to this is part-time employment where annual and weekly pay for both residents and within the local job market are higher. Certain sectors that are more likely to employ individuals on a part-time basis such as the Retail and Hospitality sectors, have experienced difficulties in recruiting staff over the last couple of years with recruitment significantly slowing towards the end of 2023. It is possible that wage levels have increased to encourage applicants and ensure employee retention, however, with employer NI contributions rising from 13.8% to 15% in April 2025, part-time-heavy industries will face increased financial pressure. It may also impact on wage growth going forward.

There remains a significant wage gap between Males and Females, as illustrated below. The pay gap in West Lothian shows females in full-time employment earn 77.6% of males, well below the Scottish pay gap level (91%).

**Table 3c: Gross weekly pay by place of residence – male and female**

	<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
Gross Weekly pay - Male Full-time Workers	£817.10	£767.70
Gross Weekly pay - Female Full-time Workers	£633.90	£701.00
Female pay as % of Male	77.6%	91%

Source: *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2024*

Part time jobs in West Lothian represent 28.9% of total jobs (compared with 28% in 2020 and 32.9% in 2018). The West Lothian level of part-time jobs is also lower than the 32.9% recorded for Scotland and 31.1% for GB.

### In-work poverty

- An estimated 14.2% of all jobs in West Lothian pay hourly rates below the living wage. Scotland has a slightly lower rate of 11.4%.
- An estimated 14.5% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage compared to 11.4% for Scotland as a whole.

## 6. Measuring Poverty at a Local Level - Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Area based deprivation 2016 SIMD in Relation to West Lothian)

The 2020 SIMD has 22 West Lothian Datazones in the 15% most deprived in Scotland, an increase of 6 from 2016. There are 37 West Lothian Datazones in the 20% most deprived in Scotland a decrease of 1 from 2016. There has therefore been a number of datazones moving into the most deprived 15% from the 15-20% range with a slight decrease in total datazones in the most deprived 20%.

Looking at the movements of West Lothian datazones, there appears to be a trend of worsening income domain scores in some datazones. This can reflect aging population, with a contracting working age and an increase in those in low paid employment. Overall, however, the number of West Lothian datazones in the most deprived 20% in Scotland has fallen since 2016.

**Table 4: Change in distribution and number of data zones in most deprived 20% category**

Area	Datazones in 2009	Datazones in 2012	Datazones in 2016	Datazones in 2020
Addiewell & Loganlea	1	1	1	1
Armadale	3	2	3	3
Bathgate	6 (3 in Boghall)	5 (2 in Boghall)	3 (0 in Boghall)	4 (1 in Boghall)
Blackburn	5	4	4	5
Blackridge	1	0	1	0
Bridgend	1	1	1	1
Broxburn	0	0	0	1
Fauldhouse	3	3	2	3
Livingston	11	11	15	13
Polbeth	2	1	1	0
Stoneyburn	1	1	1	1
Uphall	0	0	1	1
Whitburn	4	4	5	4
East Calder	1	0	0	0
<b>Total West Lothian</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>

The distribution of deprived data zones across West Lothian fits that seen in other indicators of poverty with more datazones in the West of West Lothian being found in the most deprived 20%. Over time there is relatively little movement in number of datazones by town with a small fall in Bathgate and Boghall being the most significant difference from 2009.

## 7. Children and Families

### Children in Low Income Families

**Table 5: Children in Low Income Families in West Lothian**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Armadale and Blackridge	15.0%	18.9%	17.4%	16.4%	16.0%	16.2%
Bathgate	14.6%	16.1%	13.6%	15.3%	15.7%	14.2%
Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	15.1%	18.4%	16.6%	15.9%	15.5%	15.2%
East Livingston and East Calder	15.3%	17.3%	16.6%	14.5%	16.2%	15.1%
Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley	19.9%	25.5%	21.1%	23.0%	22.1%	20.1%
Linlithgow	7.8%	8.6%	6.1%	6.2%	6.8%	6.0%
Livingston North	14.7%	18.4%	15.6%	16.9%	16.7%	16.3%
Livingston South	17.9%	19.6%	16.2%	16.1%	17.7%	16.6%
Whitburn and Blackburn	21.5%	23.6%	21.5%	20.2%	22.6%	20.8%
West Lothian	16.5%	19.2%	16.7%	16.7%	17.4%	16.4%
Scotland	16.8%	19.5%	16.8%	16.9%	17.8%	16.3%
United Kingdom	18.2%	21.1%	18.5%	19.2%	21.1%	21.9%

Source: DWP Stat-Xplore, Children in Low Income Families, NRS, Electoral Ward Population Estimates and ONS, Population Estimates. **Note:** Following the successful completion of discovery work and a period of user engagement, DWP's latest release calibrates figures to HBAI single-year UK estimates (not regional estimates) and imputes receipt of Scottish Child Payments for eligible households so it is included as an income stream. **Revisions have been made to previous year's figures at UK, regional and local area level, and the previous Poverty Profile Report 2024 shows different figures to those shown in the table above.**

In 2023/24, the latest estimate indicates that 16.4% of children (aged 0-15) living in West Lothian are in a low-income household. This figure is around the same level as the Scottish rate but lower than the UK rate. The general trend in both West Lothian and Scotland has been relatively stable over the last five years other than an increase in 2019/20 and a slight increase in 2022/23. Ward areas with the highest proportion of children in low-income families are Whitburn and Blackburn (20.8%) and Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley (20.1%).

24.1% of children were living in poverty in West Lothian in 2023/24 (compared to the Scottish national average of 23%). If we compare this to other local authorities in our local authority family group (Local Government Benchmarking Framework), we can see that over a nine-year reporting period from 2014/15 to 2023/24, there's been an increase in four local authority areas (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Renfrewshire and West Lothian) and a decrease in the other four local authority areas (Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, South Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire).

Looking at all 32 local authorities, nine have seen a decrease during this period. West Lothian is above the Scottish average, and has increased by 2.8% points since 2014/15. If we compare reported % rates 2014/15 to 2023/24, its proportionally up by 13.1% (compared to Scotland up by 6.5%). Figures have remained high both locally and nationally with around one in four children living in poverty.

**Table 6a: Percentage of Children in Child Poverty**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>Scotland</b>	21.6%	22.8%	23.4%	24.2%	23.2%	24.3%	24.6%	24.5%	24.0%	<b>23.0%</b>
Clackmannanshire	24.2%	25.5%	26.0%	27.3%	26.1%	27.3%	23.9%	28.3%	29.2%	<b>28.5%</b>
Fife	23.6%	25.0%	25.0%	26.0%	25.5%	26.4%	22.1%	26.1%	26.6%	<b>25.0%</b>
Dumfries and Galloway	23.3%	25.3%	24.8%	26.4%	25.0%	26.7%	22.9%	26.0%	26.9%	<b>22.7%</b>
Falkirk	22.7%	23.2%	23.5%	24.3%	23.8%	24.8%	21.5%	25.3%	26.2%	<b>25.1%</b>
South Ayrshire	22.7%	23.5%	24.2%	24.6%	24.6%	24.8%	20.6%	24.4%	25.0%	<b>20.7%</b>
West Lothian	21.3%	22.1%	23.0%	23.8%	22.9%	24.6%	21.1%	23.9%	24.6%	<b>24.1%</b>
Renfrewshire	19.3%	20.4%	21.3%	22.8%	21.9%	23.1%	19.5%	23.3%	24.0%	<b>21.0%</b>
South Lanarkshire	21.5%	22.4%	22.5%	23.5%	22.5%	23.1%	19.6%	22.8%	23.6%	<b>19.5%</b>

Source: UK Gov - DWP/HMRC Local Child Poverty Indicators 2023/24 (calibrated to the national Households Below Average Income (HBAI) statistics)

**Table 6b: Children in Poverty – Percentage changes by LGBF comparative family group**

Local Authorities	Percentage point change (2015-24) 9 years	Percentage change over 9 years*	Percentage point change (2018-24) 6 years	Percentage change over 6 years*	Percentage point change (2021-24) 3 years	Percentage change over 3 years*
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>-0.2%</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>	<b>-1.5%</b>	<b>-6.1%</b>
Clackmannanshire	4.3%	17.8%	2.4%	9.2%	0.2%	0.7%
Renfrewshire	1.7%	8.8%	-0.9%	-4.1%	-2.3%	-9.9%
Dumfries and Galloway	-0.6%	-2.6%	-2.3%	-9.2%	-3.3%	-12.7%
Falkirk	2.4%	10.6%	1.3%	5.5%	-0.2%	-0.8%
<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>
Fife	1.4%	5.9%	-0.5%	-2.0%	-1.1%	-4.2%
South Ayrshire	-2.0%	-8.8%	-3.9%	-15.9%	-3.7%	-15.2%
South Lanarkshire	-2.0%	-9.3%	-3.0%	-13.3%	-3.3%	-14.5%

Source: UK Gov - DWP/HMRC Local Child Poverty Indicators 2023/24 (calibrated to the national Households Below Average Income (HBAI) statistics) \*Percentage proportional change, is the calculated proportional increase or decrease of the % rate over time.

In consideration of what key factors may be linked to child poverty in local areas there are a number of possible contributory factors that may have contributed to sustained levels of child poverty:

- UK Government policy on child related benefits have continued their policy limit to the first two children in a family. The policy has been active since April 2017.
- In-work poverty – the in-work Universal Credit claimant count increased by 161% between January 2020 and February 2025. At February 2025, in-work claimants made up 6.0% of the West Lothian working age population.
- Lone parent households – children in lone parent families where the parent is in work are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the two-child benefits limit; in such families, more than half of children are estimated to be in poverty.
- The Covid Pandemic also had some impact in the shorter term on low income families. During the Pandemic, the Advice Shop saw increasing numbers of individuals seeking advice and support related on money issues and budgeting. These were attributed to the effects of the removal of the Universal Credit £20 uplift, and Covid related reduced working hours / furlough due to lockdowns resulting in drops in income levels, and loss of earnings on zero hours contracts within the gig economy.

The number of households affected by the two-child benefit cap in the UK has increased every year since the policy was introduced, going from 71,000 in 2017 to 450,000 in 2024. Abolishing the benefit cap could lift up to 15,000 children out of poverty in Scotland. [Research<sup>11</sup>](#) by the Resolution Foundation shows that 60% of families affected by the benefit cap contained at least one adult that is in work in the UK.

It was announced in the Scottish Budget for 2025-26 that the two-child benefit cap would be mitigated in Scotland. The proposal is for a payment equal to the Universal Credit child element, which is rising to £292.81 in April 2025, for each third and subsequent child impacted by the two-child cap.

The child poverty situation across the UK has worsened, however this may have been mitigated to some extent in Scotland by the extra financial help being made available to families with children via the Scottish Child Payment which was rolled out in November 2022 to families with children under 16, to provide £25 per week per child. In April 2025, the Scottish Child Payment was increased to £27.15 per week in line with inflation, however, the Poverty Alliance reported that in order to meet the child poverty target, the payment should have been increased to £30 per week and should ultimately reach £40 per week.

The latest year of child poverty data includes families who have experienced the full implementation of the Scottish Child Payment (SCP), so we would have expected to see further divergence in the poverty rate between Scotland and the rest of the UK. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) found that there is significant under-reporting of the SCP within the data and this has likely led to a higher child poverty rate than expected. The JRF also found that the SCP is having a positive impact on people's day-to-day lives which conflicts with the lack of progress seen within the data. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation predicts that the Scottish Child Payment could reduce child poverty in Scotland by around 4 percentage points by 2024/25.

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<sup>11</sup> Catastrophic Caps – Resolution Foundation, January 2024

## 8. Free School Meals and Clothing Grants

Tables 7a – 7d

Education Maintenance Allowance	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Applications Received	889	837	768	793	743	732	756	620
Numbers of applicants paid	842	785	703	743	684	635	669	576

School Clothing Grant	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Number of pupils paid	5,053	6,407	7,337	8,592	7,420	7,684	7,882	7,463
Number of applicants paid	3,888	3,818	4,405	5,173	4,565	4,739	4,885	4,667

School Clothing Grant / Free School Meals	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Applications Received	4,181	4,127	4,706	5,454
Free School Meals Approved Nursery	n/a	n/a	100	189
Free School Meals Approved P1 to P3				1,646 (through benefit)
Free School Meals Approved P4 to S6	4,422	4,162	4,195	4,943

<b>Free School Meals</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2023/2024</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>
<b>Applications Received</b>	5,210	5,254	5,344	5,322
<b>Free School Meals Approved Nursery</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Free School Meals Approved P1 to P5</b>	2,438 (through benefit)	2,517 (through benefit)	2,379 (through benefit)	2,089 (through benefit)
<b>Free School Meals Approved P6 to S6</b>	3,221	3,480	3,411	3,283
<b>Free School Meals Approved P6/P7 SCP</b>				287

*Source for Tables 7a – 7d: West Lothian Council, Benefits and Financial Support, Anti-Poverty Service.*

Take up of Clothing Grants and Free School Meals showed an increasing trend of applications from 2021/22 to 2023/24. In the latest year (2024/25) to March, there has been a slight decrease in applications for these two benefits. EMA applications increased in 2023/24, reversing the downward trend of the previous few years, however, it has decreased again in the latest year. The most likely contributor to the previous increased trend in applications, could be the Cost of Living Crisis, which impacted on household financial security during 2022-24, particularly those families with low incomes. As mentioned previously, the UK Government two child benefit cap has also had an impact on households, which has seen an increased impact every year since the policy was introduced.

Using our local authority family group, we can see that the percentage of secondary school pupils that registered for and taking Free School Meals between 2018 and 2024 has decreased in three local authorities, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries & Galloway and Falkirk. The other five local authorities have seen an increase in registrations. In West Lothian, the overall trend has been a decrease in registrations from 2018 to 2023, but there has been a significant uptick in 2024, reversing the downward trend.

**Table 7e: Percentage of secondary school pupils registered and taking Free School Meals**

Local Authority	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Clackmannanshire	89.3	84.8	98	x	63	73.4	75.5
Dumfries and Galloway	70.6	71	66	x	59.9	61.7	63.7
Falkirk	84.8	79.3	66.8	x	64	66.5	65.4
Fife	54.7	58.3	60.4	x	43.5	53.6	57.9
Renfrewshire	60.6	57.3	57.9	x	54.4	60.8	66.8
South Ayrshire	66.5	68.5	72.4	x	66.3	57	69.1
South Lanarkshire	48.8	50.9	53.5	x	58.1	62.2	71.5
West Lothian	81.3	84.4	82.5	x	76.4	64	84.5
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>72.8</b>	<b>70.9</b>	<b>70.9</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>62.7</b>

*Source: Scottish Government, School Healthy Living Survey 2024*

## 9. Food Insecurity

The West Lothian Food Network was formed in Spring 2020 and is now composed of 21-member organisations all aiming to support low income households who face food insecurity. The distribution across the Network includes a combination of cooked food, emergency food parcels, specific foods to meet the requirements of BAME groups, and access to fresh, frozen and ambient foods as well as providing toiletries, cleaning products, baby food and pet food.

The majority of households accessing community food providers since October 2022 indicate it is because they are financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed. It is expected that this demand for food support will remain for some time due to the on-going pressure on household budgets, slow wage growth, real term cuts to social security benefits and the increase in living costs.

The latest indicative report from the West Lothian Food Network shows that in quarter 4 of 2024/25, the number of people supported by the West Lothian Food Network was an estimated 16,735. The majority of those being supported by the food network are working age people, however almost a quarter (23%) are over the age of 61. Nearly half (46%) of those supported are unemployed and on benefits, 36% are single adults followed by a two-adult household (21%). Of those supported, the majority (37%) have been in employment longer than ten years. Wards with the highest level of support were Fauldhouse & the Breich Valley (31%) and Whitburn & Blackburn (21%).

In the 2024-25 financial year, Trussell delivered 7,313 emergency food parcels to people in West Lothian – 4,897 to adults and 2,416 to children. This has decreased from 8,554 parcels distributed in 2023-24. The number of food parcel distributed in West Lothian has been decreasing since 2022-23.

239,500 emergency food parcels were distributed in Scotland in 2024-25. This is a decrease (-10%) compared to 2023-24 where 262,400 parcels were distributed, the most parcels ever distributed in a year. Emergency food parcel provisions remains high and is linked to a weakened social security system. The slight decrease in 2024-25 can be attributed to easing income pressures.

Hunger and hardship fall disproportionately on particular groups of society, including single parents, families with three or more children and younger people. The Cost of Hunger and Hardship report from Trussell shows that out of people facing hunger and hardship in the UK, 58% live in a working family and 39% are in families claiming Universal credit. People living in families with three or more children (31%) and single parent families (32%) are at greater risk of facing hunger and hardship. 24% of children aged 0-4 face hunger and hardship, the highest rate for any age category. The majority of people facing hunger and hardship are renters (70%).

New research<sup>12</sup> from Trussell based on an online survey undertaken in January 2025 to February 2025 demonstrates the inadequacy of social security for disabled people across the UK. They found that 77% of people claiming Universal Credit and disability benefits have gone without essentials in the last six months and 43% have skipped meals to keep up with other essential costs in the last three months. Disabled people often face additional costs and lower incomes as a result of barriers to finding and sustaining work. A report<sup>13</sup> from Trussell found that 69% of people referred to food banks in the Trussell network are disabled. The most common disability reported by people referred to a food bank was a mental health condition (52%).

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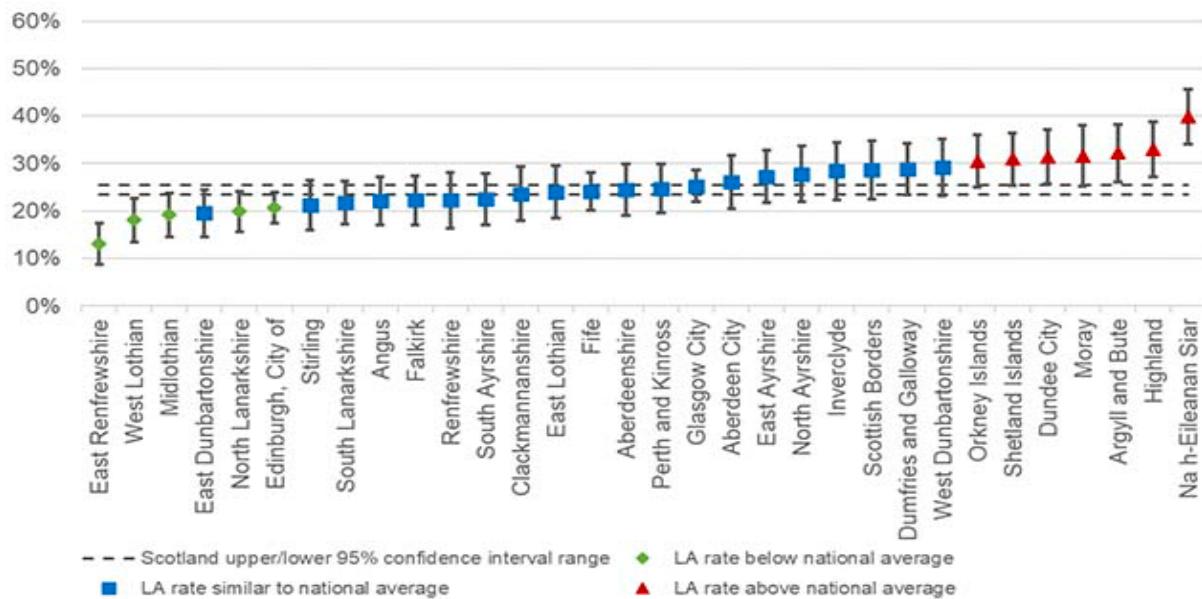
<sup>12</sup> Almost one in five people receiving Universal Credit and disability benefits used a food bank in the last month – Trussell March 2025

<sup>13</sup> Dignified, accessible Support for Disabled People and People with Health Conditions – Trussell, February 2024

## 10. Fuel Poverty

Due to disruption from the Covid pandemic the latest local authority data is from 2019. However, in Scotland, fuel poverty rates increased to 34% in 2023, up from 31% in 2022. Extreme fuel poverty rates increased to 19.4% in 2023, up from 18.5% in 2022. In total, there are 861,000 fuel poor households in Scotland and the majority of fuel poor households (591,000) are also in income poverty.

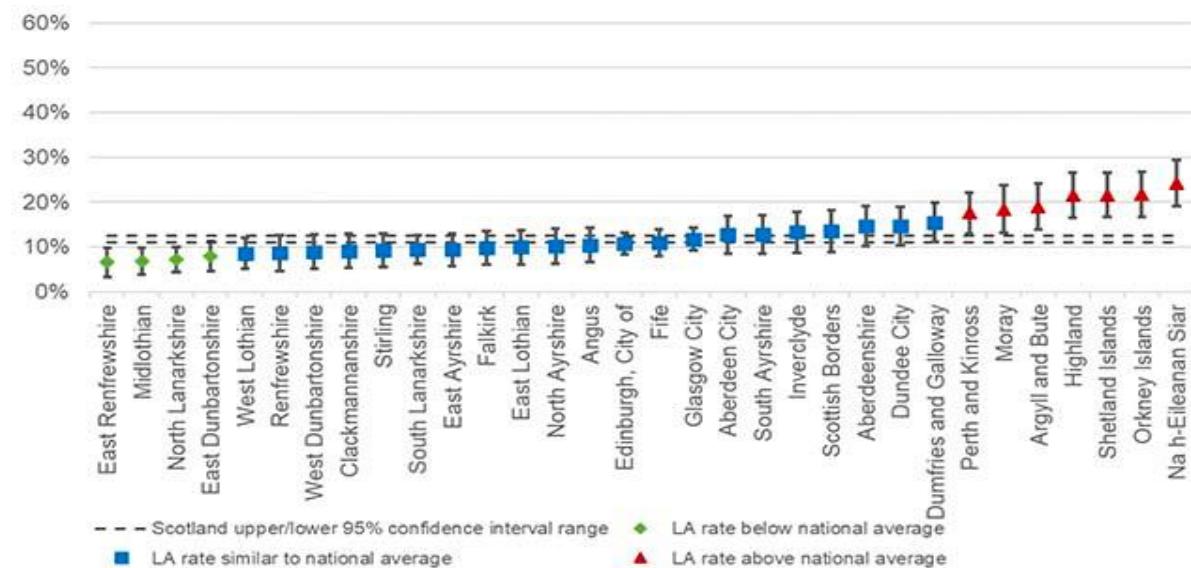
**Figure 4a: Percent Dwellings in Fuel Poverty by local authority compared to Scotland. SHCS 2017-19**



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis 2017-2019

In the period 2017-2019, the fuel poverty rate varied from 13% in East Renfrewshire to 40% in Na h-Eileanan Siar compared to the average in Scotland of 24%. West Lothian was among five local authorities that had significantly lower fuel poverty rates than the national average, these were: West Lothian (18%) compared to East Renfrewshire (13%), Midlothian (19%), North Lanarkshire (20%) and City of Edinburgh (21%). Seven local authorities had significantly higher fuel poverty rates than the national average, these were: Na h-Eileanan Siar (40%), Highland (33%), Argyll and Bute (32%), Moray (32%), Dundee City (31%), Shetland Islands (31%) and Orkney Islands (31%).

**Figure 4b: Percent Dwellings in Extreme Fuel Poverty by local authority compared to Scotland. SHCS 2017-19**



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis 2017-2019

In the period 2017-2019, the extreme fuel poverty rate varied from 7% in East Renfrewshire to 24% in Na h-Eileanan Siar compared to the average in Scotland of 12%. West Lothian was among six local authorities that had significantly lower fuel poverty rates than the national average, these were: West Lothian (9%) compared to East Renfrewshire (7%), Midlothian (7%), North Lanarkshire (7%) and East Dunbartonshire (8%).

Seven local authorities had significantly higher extreme fuel poverty rates than the national average, these were: Na h-Eileanan Siar (24%), Orkney Islands (22%), Shetland Islands (22%), Highland (22%), Argyll and Bute (19%), Moray (19%) and Perth and Kinross (18%). All of these local authorities had a greater prevalence than average of lower energy efficient properties (those rated EPC F or G).

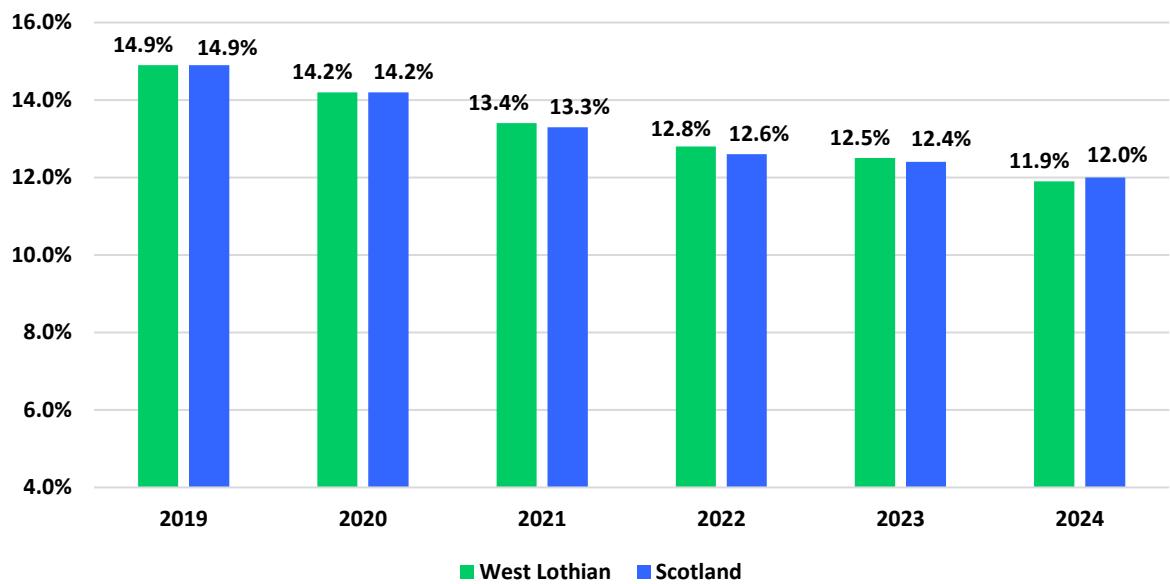
Over the last four years the Anti-Poverty Service has been rolling out Energy Grants to help with soaring energy prices. In West Lothian 3,766 clients received an Energy Grant. Clients receiving Energy Grants were located across all the SIMD quintiles (full range) but the majority of clients were within quintile 1 (35.3%) and quintile 2 (37.5%) (most deprived areas).

## 11. Pensioners on Fixed / Low Income

There are 30,867 people in West Lothian receiving the state pension. Of these, 3,672 (11.9%) receive Pension Credits to ensure a minimum income. This rate is equal to the Scottish level.

The number of pensioners claiming means tested top-up benefit Pension Credit has noticeably decreased in West Lothian since 2012, and take-up rate has continued to fall over the last five years. This may be due to lack of awareness of entitlement or reluctance to claim as there is an estimated £5 million unclaimed Pension Credit in West Lothian alone.

**Figure 5: Percentage of pensioners in receipt of pension credit**



Source: DWP, StatXplore

A [report<sup>14</sup>](#) from Standard Life shows that in 2024, people are expecting to retire later than they would like. The number of people who went back to work after retiring is down significantly from 2023 (7% in 2024 compared to 14% in 2023). The main reasons for going back to work were lifestyle related: wanting more money for luxuries (43%) and feeling bored (38%). In West Lothian, there were around 2,600 people aged over 65 in employment in 2024. This counts for around 8% of the over-65 population.

Pensioner poverty has been rising with around 15% of pensioners in Scotland experiencing poverty. Age Scotland's [National Housing Survey](#) for older people identified that 39% of pensioners are living in fuel poverty in 2023, compared to 19% in 2021. This survey was undertaken during the Cost of Living Crisis where the key concerns that older people had included fuel poverty and affordable housing. It found there was a low awareness of energy efficiency schemes at a time when 87% of respondents had experienced an increase in energy costs.

## 12. Conclusions

The overall poverty picture outlined in this report suggests that overall West Lothian has slightly lower levels of poverty and deprivation than Scotland and Great Britain. However, a significant segment of the population experience challenging financial and material circumstances, with approximately 14.2% of jobs located within West Lothian paying hourly rates below the living wage level. 14.5% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage level compared to 11.4% for Scotland as a whole.

<sup>14</sup> Retirement Voice 2024 – Standard Life

Fewer people are claiming out of work benefits and more people are in employment than when the first anti-poverty strategy was developed in 2012. Local unemployment is 2.7% of the general working age population, which is below both the Scottish and UK average. However, people who are in work but required financial support from Universal Credit (UC) as their income was not sufficient, has increased by 161% between January 2020 and February 2025. In-work claimants make up 6.0% of the West Lothian working age population. There is some emerging evidence of increased post-retirement working due to cost of living pressures, however, retirees going back into the workforce has slowed down in 2024.

Whilst unemployment and economic inactivity as a result of ill health, disabilities or caring responsibilities can contribute as key drivers to poverty, the reduction in unemployment over the last five years has been accompanied by an increase in the number of “working poor” and growth in insecure jobs and underemployment.

Gross wage levels for West Lothian (workplace) are generally just below the Scottish levels. The exception to this is part-time employment where annual and weekly pay for both residents and within the local job market are higher. The tightening of labour supply and an ageing workforce can be seen as an opportunity for local people to retrain and up-skill.

The majority of households accessing West Lothian Food Network community food providers since October 2022 appear to be financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed. The majority of those accessing community food providers indicate it is because they are financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed. It is expected that this demand for food support will remain for some time due to the on-going pressure on household budgets, slowing wage growth, real term cuts to social security benefits and the increase in living costs.

The latest official child poverty data for Scotland shows that the majority of children living in poverty are in households where someone works. The latest estimate indicates that 16.4% of children (aged 0-15) living in West Lothian are in a low-income household. This figure is around the same level as the Scottish rate and lower than the UK rate. The general trend in both West Lothian and Scotland has been relatively stable over the last five years other than an increase in 2019/20 and a slight increase in 2022/23. UK Government policy on child related benefits, introduced in 2017, has continued the policy limit to the first two children in a family. Children in lone parent families where the parent is in work are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the two-child benefits limit; in such families, more than half of children are estimated to be in poverty.

The number of households affected by the two-child benefit cap in the UK has increased every year since the policy was introduced, going from 71,000 in 2017 to 450,000 in 2024. Abolishing the benefit cap could lift up to 15,000 children out of poverty in Scotland. The child poverty situation across the UK has worsened, however this may have been mitigated to some extent in Scotland by the extra financial help being made available to families with children via the Scottish Child Payment which was rolled out in November 2022 to families with children under 16, and now provides £27.15 per week per child. The Poverty Alliance estimates that in order to meet the child poverty target, the payment should have been increased to £30 per week and should ultimately reach £40 per week.

The number of pensioners claiming means tested top-up benefit Pension Credit has noticeably decreased in West Lothian since 2012, and has continued to fall over the last five years. This may be

due to lack of awareness of entitlement or reluctance to claim as there is an estimated £5 million unclaimed Pension Credit in West Lothian alone. There is some emerging evidence of increased post-retirement working due to cost of living pressures, however, retirees going back into the workforce has slowed down in 2024.

In terms of relative levels of poverty, the pattern across West Lothian evidenced through the SIMD provides a basis for informing the targeting of interventions. Not surprisingly, the Whitburn and Blackburn area has the highest apparent levels of poverty (and the Linlithgow area having significantly lower levels than the West Lothian average). There are however local pockets of deprivation across West Lothian where higher levels of income deprivation are present.

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