

Updated Poverty Profile of West Lothian – 2026

1. Introduction - West Lothian Poverty in Context

In 2026, the profile of West Lothian tells us that the demographics of poverty has continued to change and, in some aspects, have worsened following the impact of the Cost of Living crisis over the past four years.

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 remain close to the Scottish levels. However, with the increase in 2025 in employer National Insurance contributions, the minimum wage and the living wage, and increasing business costs, this has resulted in a slowing in the rate of wage growth. UK economy has also been stuck in a cycle of slow growth for several years.

This in turn has resulted in a slowing down in the job market, underemployment among younger people, and increased job insecurity. The Cost of Living crisis has also contributed to a significant squeeze on household incomes across both low and middle-income households. These key factors all impact the working age population, creating potential for higher levels of 'in-work poverty'.

Local unemployment is 2.5% of the general working age population, and has remained stable around the 2.5% rate over the last couple of years. This rate is 0.5% below the Scottish average and 1.4% below the UK average. The labour market has cooled across Scotland over the last year, and while recruitment has slowed, there has still been sustained demand for workers in the West Lothian region throughout 2025. It is expected that while national unemployment rates may see a small rise during 2026, the impact locally is likely to be less.

While unemployment levels may rise slightly in 2026, the key current poverty issues are seen in increasing in-work poverty and child poverty.

In-work universal credit claimants, an indicator of in-work poverty, made up 6% of the West Lothian working age population by the end of 2025. The level of in-work universal credit claims has remained consistently high since the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020. By the start of 2025, the number of claimants finally started to decrease, and the rate of claims levelled out. The rate of claims is unlikely to significantly decrease until the UK economy improves and the impact of the Cost of Living crisis has reduced and no longer causes an economic squeeze on low income households.

The latest official child poverty data for Scotland shows that the majority of children living in poverty are in households where someone works. The Cost of Living crisis has increased child poverty due to rising food, energy and housing cost, with low-income families increasingly relying on food banks and going without essentials. Nearly 9 in 10 children in poverty are in the Scottish Government's 'priority families' – those identified as being in families where someone is disabled; single-parent families; families with a baby; large families or minority ethnic families. These groups are rarely isolated, and their intersecting nature is shown as the majority of children in poverty in Scotland were in 2 or more priority groups (58%).

The number of working-age adults who are out of the labour market, known as "economically inactive" because of long-term sickness or disability, has been rising since 2019. There have been increasing numbers of young people falling out of work or education. Over a quarter of NEET¹ young people are citing long-term sickness or disability as a barrier to participation. Key barriers to the inactive returning to work were identified in a recent study by Edinburgh and SE Scotland City Region Deal LMAE research group, included: Mental and physical health issues; Disability; Caring responsibilities; Long term work disengagement; and Low or no qualifications. Many experience multiple barriers. Recent feedback to West Lothian Employability advisers suggests that economically inactive individuals would be willing to return the labour force but were discouraged by lack of knowledge on how to find support and advice. UK Government recently reallocated Jobcentre work coaches to offer voluntary support to LCWRA claimants² to help break down barriers to re-engaging with the labour market, via their Universal Credit journal with tailored appointments taking place monthly³.

Looking at the post-retirement demographic, the number of pensioners claiming means tested top-up benefit Pension Credit 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. After the UK Government launched their Pension Credit campaign, over 56,000 households in the UK were awarded Pension Credit in one year (July 2024 – July 2025) compared to the previous year.

- 14% of the West Lothian population experience some form of financial hardship
- 24.1% of children in West Lothian are living in poverty. Scottish average is 23%
- 73% of children in poverty live in working families in Scotland
- 18% of West Lothian households are in fuel poverty. 9% of West Lothian households are in extreme fuel poverty. 28.7% of Scottish households are in fuel poverty in 2024
- 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 2.5% of the general working age population and 4.5% for 18-24-year olds
- The West Lothian unemployment rate is 0.5% below the Scottish average and 1.4% below UK average
- 2,945 people in West Lothian are receiving Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit and are searching for work
- 0.71 jobs available per working age person
- 87,400 of West Lothian working age population (72.6%) are in employment
- Average weekly pay for full time employment is £768.90 or £40,134 per year (West Lothian residents)
- Scottish averages for full time weekly pay are £775.60 weekly pay and £39,905 per year
- 14.2% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage
- West Lothian has 22 data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland
- 31,485 people in West Lothian receive state pension. 3,787 (12%) receive Pension Credit to ensure a minimum income, which is the same as the Scottish rate (12%).

¹ Not in Education, Employment, or Training - refers to young people (aged 16–24) disengaged from both the workforce and education systems.

² Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity is a Universal Credit status for people whose health condition or disability prevents them from working or preparing for work.

³ [Ramped up job support for people on sickness benefits - GOV.UK](#)

2. Economic Picture - Cost of Living Crisis

Many Scottish households are struggling financially. The Scottish Consumer Sentiment Indicator Survey's latest [results](#)⁴ for Q4 2025 shows respondents think the Scottish economy is performing worse than it was 12 months ago and expects the economy to be performing worse 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](#)⁵ shows that half of Scots are reducing non-essential spending, cutting back on leisure activities and reducing heating and energy use. Financial worries continue to have a tangible impact on many Scots, with three in ten reporting detriments to their mental health (28%) and a quarter losing sleep (25%).

Inflation increased throughout the first half of 2025. In autumn, inflation finally began to fall, reaching 3.0% in January 2026, down from 3.4% in December 2025. Inflation has remained above the Bank of England's target of 2% for 16 months in a row. The Office for Budget Responsibility had expected inflation to fall to around 2.1% by the last quarter of 2026, however, there are concerns that the war in the Middle East and wider global issues could push inflation back up due to rising cost of oil and gas and effects on product supply chains. Owner occupiers' housing costs inflation decreased to 3.9% in January 2026, down from 4.2% in December 2025, and decreased from 8% one year ago in January 2025.

The reduction in inflation to date is positive news: high inflation erodes purchasing power, causes the cost of living to rise faster than wages, and reduces household incomes and the standard of living. It typically leads to higher interest rates, reduced savings value, and an increased financial strain on low-income households.

The U.S. introduced a 10% tax on goods for the vast majority of countries including the UK in April 2025 - and a 25% global tariff on cars. [Research](#)⁶ from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shows that as a result, global growth is now expected to slow to 3.1% during 2026, even though the tariff shock is smaller than originally announced.

Average wages in the UK have continued to outpace inflation. Growth in employees' average *total* pay (including bonuses) was 4.2% in the three months to December 2025, and also 4.2% in *regular* pay (excluding bonuses). Adjusting for inflation (using CPIH) shows an increase in real terms pay growth, with both regular pay and total pay increasing by 0.5%. As the labour market has weakened and recruitment slowing, and businesses experiencing increasing overheads, it is likely that wage growth will slow even further this year.

In December 2025, the Bank of England reduced the Bank Rate by 0.25 percentage points, to 3.75%, due to inflation falling further than expected to an eight-month low of 3.2%. The main measures announced in the Autumn Budget that are expected to help curb inflation include: extending a 5p cut in fuel duty, the removal of green levies on energy bills, scrapping a customer-funded home insulation scheme, and the freezing of rail fares until March 2027. If inflation does not decrease and instead rises due to global uncertainty, then the Bank of England would need to implement a tighter monetary policy and potentially push interest rates up again. Services price inflation and wage growth still needs

⁴ Scottish Consumer Sentiment Indicator: 2025 Quarter 4

⁵ Understanding Scotland Economy Tracker November 2025

⁶ World Economic Outlook: Global Economy in Flux, Prospects Remain Dim – International Monetary Fund October 2025

to fall further for the Monetary Policy Committee to be confident that inflation will return to the target and stay there.

The Bank of England has lowered its economic growth forecast for the UK in 2026 to 0.9%, down from 1.2%. Growth for 2027 was also downgraded to 1.5% from 1.6%. The UK unemployment rate is now forecast to reach 5.3% this year, up from 5% previously forecast.

According to the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI), Scottish GDP growth (a measure of economic productivity) in Q2 to Q3 2025 began to outpace the rest of the UK for the first time since 2024. FAI estimates that the Scottish economy grew by 1.3% in 2025, 0.1% below the Bank of England forecast for the UK economy. FAI estimates that the Scottish economy will continue to grow slowly by 1.1% in 2026 followed by 1.2% in 2027.

There were signs of optimism when the energy price guarantee ended, that consumer bills would not be as high as originally expected. From January 2026, the Ofgem energy price cap was set at £1,758, an increase of 0.2% compared to the cap set for the previous quarter (£1,738). The price cap is around 45% higher than it was in winter 2021/22. The energy price cap is due to fall by 6.7% to £1,641 per year for typical households from April to June 2026, lowering bills by about £117 annually. However, energy prices are projected to rise significantly in July 2026 due to escalating geopolitical tensions, potentially reversing the temporary spring relief.

Results from ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey December 2025 estimated that 31% of UK respondents reported it was very or somewhat difficult to afford their rent or mortgage payments with 25% reporting their rent or mortgage had gone up in the last 6 months. 40% of respondents said that they were spending less on food and essentials to combat increases in the cost of living. In December 2025, 62% of respondents estimated that their cost of living had increased compared to the month before, with people aged over 70 estimating their cost of living had increased the most (70%).

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, particularly in light of the recent developments of the conflict in the Middle East affecting global supply chains and energy prices.

3. Employment and Economic Activity

The working age population in West Lothian is now estimated at 118,637, and is projected to increase by 5.1% up to 2032 (Scotland will increase by 4.4%)⁷.

Latest estimates indicate that 72.6% (87,400) of the working age population are in employment (compared to 74.2% for Scotland). Within this total, there are an estimated 78,300 employees (65.1%) and 8,000 self-employed (6.6%). The latest estimated jobs density⁸ for West Lothian is 0.71 jobs available per working age person (compared to Scotland 0.83).

Job postings in Scotland slightly increased in December 2025 compared with November 2025, rising to 37,000 (by 0.3%), reflecting a continued but slowing recruitment market.

Due to rising cost pressures, fewer businesses are taking on new staff while some have been making redundancies or not backfilling positions. In Scotland, recruitment challenges are among roles that are often more physically demanding or unsuitable for remote work. Businesses cited skilled, manual labour, or technical labourers as the most difficult to recruit.

UK employers are still facing challenges with a labour market mismatch reflecting an imbalance between the skills, qualifications, or locations of job seekers and the requirements of available positions, resulting in unfilled vacancies. UK HR decision-makers were asked what workplace issues were the most pressing in 2026. Top results⁹ included recruiting qualified talent, retaining employees and managing rising costs.

The UK economy slowed down in the second half of 2025 with a fall of 0.1% in the three months to November and only a 0.1% growth in the three months to December. A small rise in unemployment, weak consumer spending and an increase in tax have all impacted on the economy's growth. The UK's overall employment rate has risen to 5.2%, with the Bank of England projecting the UK employment rate could potentially rise to 5.3% by mid-2026, higher than forecast at the end of 2025.

Unemployment

- The latest Headline Claimant Count based unemployment is 2,945 or 2.5% (January 2026)
- The Model based unemployment estimate is 3,400 (3.3%)
- The Youth unemployment level based on 18 to 24-year-olds claiming JSA and Universal Credit is 605 (4.5%) (January 2026).

The WL general unemployment U.C. rate has returned to pre-pandemic levels and has remained stable around the 2.5% rate over the last couple of years. It is 0.5% lower than the Scottish average (3.0%) and 1.4% lower than the UK average (3.9%).

The labour market has cooled across Scotland, and job postings have declined from a peak in 2022. Whilst the labour market has softened, there has still been sustained demand for workers in the West

⁷ This projection does not take account of changes to the retirement age.

⁸ Estimated by the number of jobs in an area divided by the resident working population (16-64)

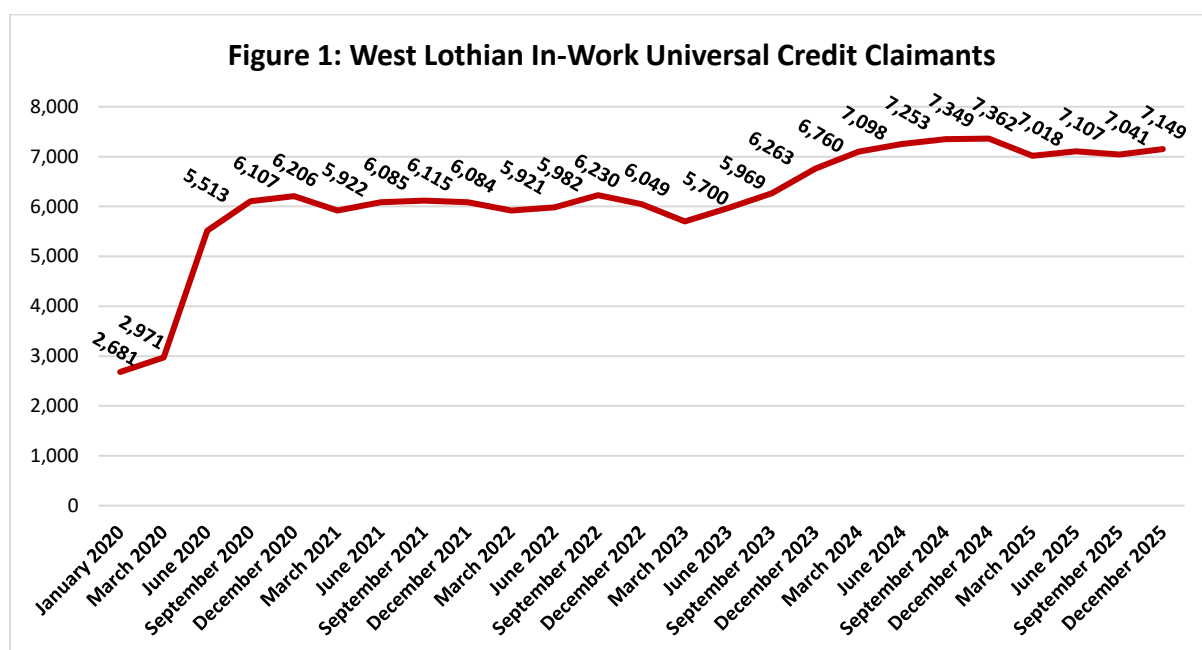
⁹ Recruitment tops list of employers' biggest challenges – Ciphir October 2025

Lothian region throughout 2025. It is expected that while national unemployment rates may see a small rise during 2026, the impact locally is likely to be less.

Table 1: Unemployment				
	West Lothian (numbers)	West Lothian (%)	Scotland (%)	Great Britain (%)
Claimant Count	2,945	2.5	3.0	3.9
Model based unemployment	3,400	3.3	3.7	4.3
Youth claimant count (18-24)	605	4.5	4.2	5.6

Source: ONS/NOMIS

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 167% between January 2020 (2,681 claimants) and December 2025 (7,149). At December 2025, in-work claimants made up 6% of the West Lothian working age population. The Rate has decreased from 6.2% in December 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. From January 2025, claimants started to decrease, and the rate of claims has since levelled out. It is likely that the rate of claims is unlikely to significantly decrease until the UK economy improves and the impact of the Cost of Living crisis has reduced.

Looking at the gender split, 8% of working age females and 4% of working age males were in-work UC claimants. Wards with the highest in-work claimant rate were: Whitburn & Blackburn 1,135 (1%) and

Livingston South 1,036 (0.9%)¹⁰. 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 couple of years. The Universal Credit managed migration is now underway and it has been reported that around 83% 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 early 2026.

In West Lothian, 6,487 people claimed Universal Credit after receiving a migration notice. Of those that claimed UC, 1,651 claimed before they needed a reminder, 1,153 people claimed after receiving one reminder and 3,681 people claimed after receiving multiple reminders. 850 people did not claim UC after being sent multiple reminders and had their legacy benefit closed.

Working Age Economically Inactive

Table 2: Working Age Economically Inactive (Jan 2024-Dec 2024)				
	West Lothian	West Lothian	Scotland	Great Britain
	(Numbers)	(%)	(%)	(%)
TOTAL	27,100	23.2	23.2	21.6
Student	5,200	19.1	23.6	26.9
Looking After Family/Home	5,200	19.2	16.3	18.4
Long-Term Sick	11,600	42.8	34.3	28.4
Retired	3,000	11.1	14.8	12.8
Wants A Job	5,800	21.3	16.9	18.3
Does Not Want A Job	21,300	78.7	83.1	81.7

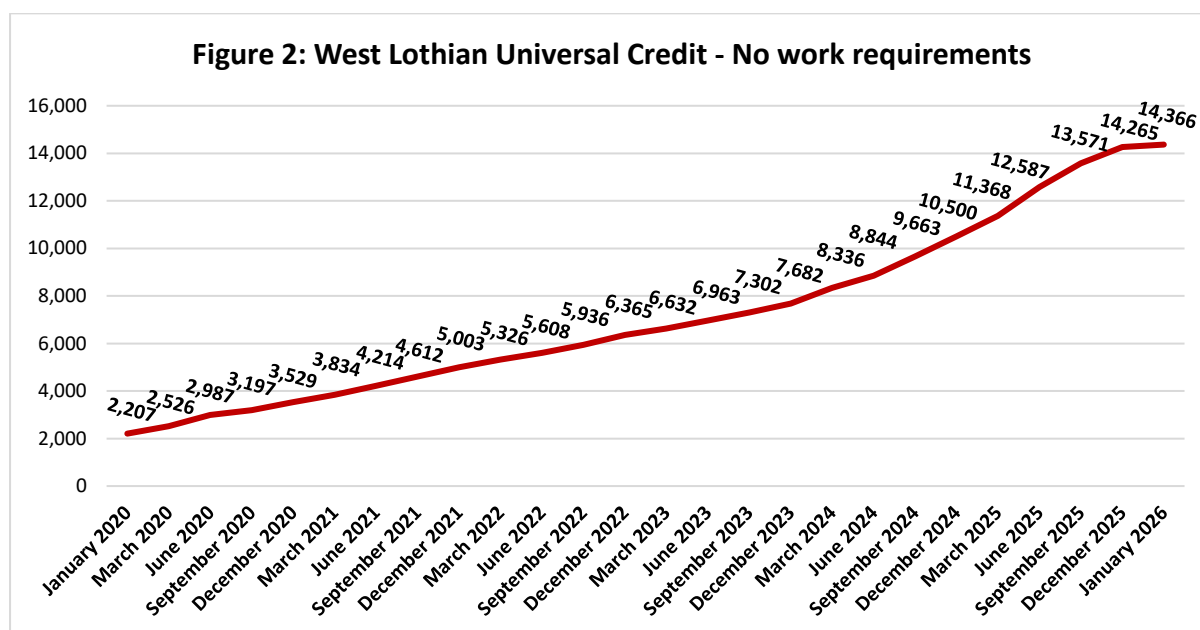
Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey

During the latest ONS estimate for the year to December 2024, discounting those who have retired, around 24,100 were identified as economically inactive which translates to 20.3% 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

¹⁰ Rates calculated on total number of claimants in each ward as a percentage of total resident working population of West Lothian.

conditions or caring responsibilities. This group has increased significantly by 12,159 (551%) since the pre-Covid period (taken from January 2020). This group represented 59% of the total West Lothian UC caseload in January 2026.



Source: DWP, StatXplore

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. 50% of adults in Scotland reported living with at least one long-term health condition in 2024 and 39% of adults had a long-term health condition which limited their activities. 81% of adults who reported living with a long-term health condition experienced at least one impairment as a result; mobility (32%), stamina/breathing/fatigue (28%) and mental health (26%).

Scotland's Labour Market Insights for January 2026 show that "Long-term sick or disabled" was the main reason given for being inactive in Scotland. Latest estimates show that 33.8% 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.

The UK Government's final Keep Britain Working¹¹ report highlights that more than 1 in 5 working-age adults are now economically inactive. The number of people not working due to ill health has reached 2.8 million, an increase of around 800,000 since before the pandemic. It estimates that without action, a further 600,000 people could be out of work due to ill health by 2030. Other factors contributing to the rise in economic inactivity includes the rise of mental health issues among young people, older

¹¹ Keep Britain Working: Final Report – UK Government November 2025

workers retiring early and disabled people being locked out of work at twice the rate of non-disabled people.

The UK Government has launched the Timms Review¹² to ensure that Personal Independence Payments (PIP) is fair and fit for the future and helps support disabled people to achieve better health, higher living standards and greater independence, including through employment. PIP supports people with the extra costs associated with having a disability or long-term health condition and the government is committed to ensuring it remains a non-means-tested benefit for people in and out of work. The review will be co-produced with disabled people and will look at how PIP supports disabled people. The Timms Review will finish in Autumn 2026 and no changes will be made to PIP until after the review is finished.

Nearly one million young people aged 16-24 across the UK are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). Over a quarter of NEET young people are citing long-term sickness or disability as a barrier to participation compared to 12% in 2013/14. The UK Government's Milburn Review¹³ will look at why there are increasing numbers of young people falling out of work or education, with a particular focus on the impact of mental health conditions and disability. Interim findings will be shared with the Government in Spring 2026, with the final report due to be published in Summer 2026.

Low Income Employees

There is no breakdown of sub-groups of low pay employees at local authority level, however at UK level¹⁴ it was established that:

- 4.4 million (one in seven) UK jobs were low paid. This marks a modest year on year reduction by 1.1% from 4.5 million (one in six) jobs compared to the previous year.
- The Hospitality sector had the highest proportion of jobs paid below the real Living wage at (53.1%), which equates to 760,000 jobs. This was closely followed by Retail & Wholesale at 29%, representing over a quarter of all low paid jobs in the UK (1.07 million jobs).
- Hospitality has been the sector with the highest level of low paid jobs for 14 years.
- In 2024/25, the disability pay gap was £2.24 per hour (15.5%). This is a modest improvement from last year, when it was £2.35 per hour (17.2%).
- Around 70% of disabled employees earn less than £15 an hour.
- Median hourly pay for disabled women is £3.80 less than it is for non-disabled men (27.3% gap).
- In 2025, 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.
- Jobs held by women represent well over half (58.6%) of all jobs paid below the real Living Wage. In 2025, women continued to be considerably more likely to earn less than the real Living Wage than men, with 16.8% of jobs held by women being low paid, compared to 12.3% among men. The low pay gender gap narrowed again between 2024 and 2025 to 4.5 percentage points.
- From April 2024, the age threshold for the National Living Wage was extended to workers aged 21 and 22 (previously applied to those aged 23+). Workers aged 18 – 21 remain by far the most likely to be paid below the Living Wage, with over half (57%) of their jobs falling

¹² [The Timms Review - GOV.UK](#)

¹³ [Independent investigation to be launched to tackle rising youth inactivity - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁴ Employee jobs paid below the real living wage: 2025 – Living Wage Foundation, February 2026

below the Living wage and representing around 800,000 jobs. A key driver of this is that the statutory minimum wage sets a lower minimum wage rate for workers aged 18 – 21, separate from the National living wage set for workers aged 21 and over.

- Median yearly pay is £14,429 for 16-17-year-olds and £23,596 for 18-21-year-olds.

The Living Wage Foundation commissioned a poll of 2,007 UK workers paid below the real Living Wage to understand the impact of low pay on different aspects of their lives. Key findings of [Life on Low Pay 2025: The impact of low wages on UK workers](#) include:

- 12% of low-paid workers have no money left over each week or find themselves in further debt after paying for basics.
- 59% skipped meals, turned off the heating, fell behind on bills or took out a pay-day loan in the past year to cover essentials.
- 42% have used a foodbank in the past year.
- 41% report their level of pay negatively affects their overall quality of life.
- 42% report their level of pay negatively affects their mental health, and 34% report that it negatively affects their physical health.

At [Scotland¹⁵](#) level it was established that:

- Around one in seven (14%) of workers in Scotland are locked in persistent low-pay. Those experience persistent poverty are those have been in poverty for three or more of the last four years.
- 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. 42% of women employed in Scotland work part-time compared to 13% of men.
- Low levels of educational attainment in young people may lead to lower wages, insecure employment and a greater risk of unemployment. By aged 22-23, low attainers are more likely to earn less (with an estimated average difference of £23.45 per week for men, and £44.94 for women) and be in low-status jobs. Young people with low or no qualifications are disproportionately likely to have never worked or been out of work for longer.
- A consistent finding on in-work poverty was the undervaluation of part-time work. Findings from [Close the Gap \(2025\)](#) showed a pay gap of 22.9% when comparing men's full-time average hourly earnings with women's part-time average hourly earnings.
- 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.
- Latest data from Scottish Government's [Understanding the Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland Report¹⁶](#), found that the Cost of Living crisis has heavily impacted on low income households. 15% of Scottish households surveyed had cut back on essentials such as food in the previous six months to help manage their household finances, rising to 45% of households who were managing less well financially.

¹⁵ Poverty in Scotland 2025 – Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Scottish Government Persistent Poverty in Scotland 2010-2023. Close the Gap Statistics [Close the Gap | Statistics](#). Scottish Government - Understanding the Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland 2025

¹⁶ [Understanding the Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland](#)

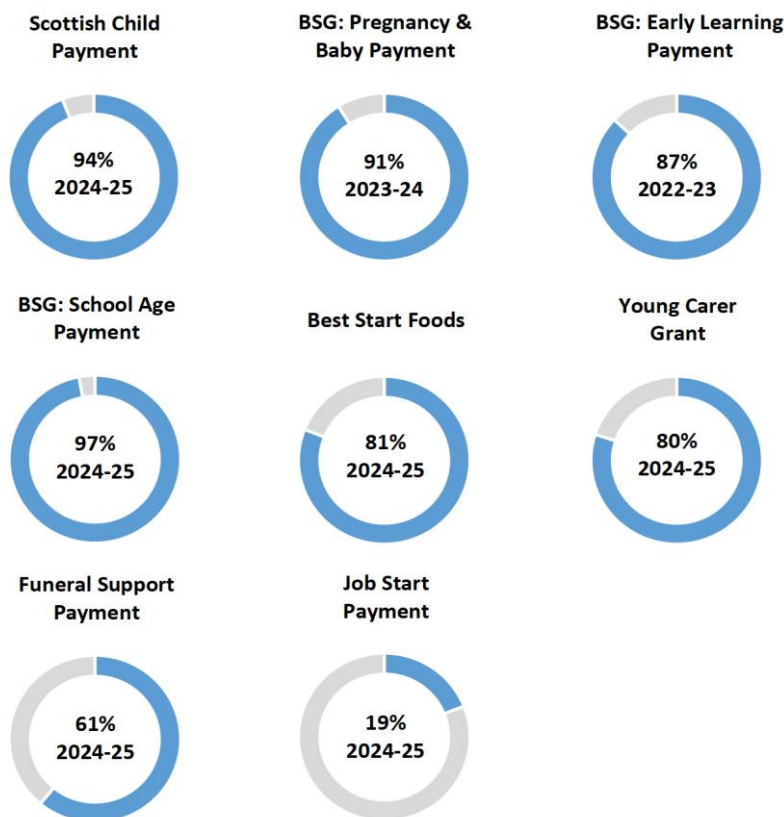
4. Scottish Claimed Benefits

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.

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 2024-25 is 80%, a moderate decrease from last year’s estimate of 87%. Successful applications to Young Carer Grant increased by around 6% between 2023-24 and 2024-25 while the estimated number of people eligible increased by around 16%.

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



Source: Scottish Government, *Take-up rates of Scottish benefits: October 2025*

19% of eligible young people took-up their entitlement to Job Start Payment in 2024-25. This has slightly decreased from last year where the take-up was estimated to be 21%. 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 61% of eligible deaths in 2024-25. The take-up rate has decreased from an estimated 67% in the previous financial year (2023-24). While the number of people estimated to be eligible for Funeral Support Payment in 2024-25 increased by around 3%, the number of payments made fell by around 14%. 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:

- Prioritising person-centred approaches
- Communicating and engaging effectively
- Bringing services to people
- Encouraging cross-system collaboration
- Continuously learning and improving

The Scottish Government administer a group of benefits called the Five Family Payments which provide low income families with increased income through the Scottish Child Payment, provide financial support at key transitions such as starting school through Best Start Grants and making healthy food more affordable through Best Start Foods.

Table 3a: Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods by component

Local Authority	Total applications received	Applications for Best Start Grant - Pregnancy and Baby Payment		Applications for Best Start Grant - Early Learning Payment		Applications for Best Start Grant - School Age Payment		Applications for Best Start Foods	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Clackmannanshire	485	320	66%	100	21%	45	9%	420	86%
Dumfries and Galloway	1,205	765	63%	255	21%	95	8%	1,035	86%
Falkirk	1,665	940	56%	330	20%	285	17%	1,255	75%
Fife	3,255	2,055	64%	765	24%	320	10%	2,725	85%
Renfrewshire	1,555	1,030	66%	295	19%	155	10%	1,325	85%
South Ayrshire	865	545	63%	180	21%	70	8%	710	82%
South Lanarkshire	2,845	1,870	66%	605	21%	285	10%	2,455	86%
West Lothian	1,810	1,135	63%	415	23%	120	7%	1,560	86%
Scotland	47,745	30,235	63%	10,235	21%	4,765	10%	40,235	84%

Source: Social Security Scotland, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods 2024-25. Note: Applications for multiple types of payments are counted multiple times so adding up the components will not equal the total number of applications.

Table 3b: Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods

Local Authority	Total applications processed	Authorised applications	Denied applications	Withdrawn applications	% Processed applications authorised	% Denied applications	% Withdrawn applications
Clackmannanshire	465	305	155	5	66%	33%	1%
Dumfries and Galloway	1,230	830	385	15	68%	31%	1%
Falkirk	1,675	980	670	20	59%	40%	1%
Fife	3,245	2,175	1,025	35	67%	32%	1%
Renfrewshire	1,545	1,010	510	30	65%	33%	2%
South Ayrshire	850	545	305	5	64%	36%	1%
South Lanarkshire	2,855	1,875	945	35	66%	33%	1%
West Lothian	1,755	1,195	540	20	68%	31%	1%
Scotland	47,585	30,830	16,000	755	65%	34%	2%

Source: Social Security Scotland, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods 2024-25

In 2024-25, out of 1,755 processed applications for Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods, 1,195 (68%) were authorised in West Lothian. This is higher than the Scottish rate of 65%. Comparing the take-up rate with our LGBF family group, the local authorities with the highest take-up rate were: Dumfries & Galloway (68%) and West Lothian (68%). Falkirk had the lowest take-up rate at 59%.

Table 3c: Scottish Child Payment

Local Authority	Total applications processed	Total authorised applications	Denied applications	Withdrawn applications	% Processed applications authorised	% Denied applications	% Withdrawn applications
Clackmannanshire	460	320	135	5	70%	30%	1%
Dumfries and Galloway	1,085	765	310	10	71%	29%	1%
Falkirk	1,390	960	405	25	69%	29%	2%
Fife	2,965	2,125	810	35	72%	27%	1%
Renfrewshire	1,375	960	395	20	70%	29%	1%
South Ayrshire	775	550	215	10	71%	28%	1%
South Lanarkshire	2,615	1,805	785	25	69%	30%	1%
West Lothian	1,610	1,145	445	25	71%	28%	1%
Scotland	43,760	30,935	12,160	665	71%	28%	2%

Source: Social Security Scotland, Scottish Child Payment 2024-25

In 2024-25, out of 1,610 processed applications for a Scottish Child Payment (SCP), 1,145 (71%) were authorised in West Lothian. This is the same rate as Scotland (71%). Comparing the take-up rate with our LGBF family group, the local authorities with the highest take-up rate were: Fife (72%), Dumfries & Galloway (71%), South Ayrshire (71%) and West Lothian (71%).

5. Pay and In-Work Poverty

Table 4a: Earnings by place of residence			
	West Lothian	Scotland	% difference
Gross Annual pay - Full-time workers	£40,134	£39,905	0.6%
Gross Annual pay - Part-time workers	£15,784	£15,676	0.7%
Gross Weekly pay - Full-time workers	£768.90	£775.60	-0.9%
Gross Weekly pay - Part-time workers	£302.70	£295.90	2.3%
Gross Hourly pay - Full-time workers	£20.31	£20.36	-0.2%
Gross Hourly pay - Part-time workers	£14.25	£14.76	-3.5%

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2025

Table 4b: Earnings by workplace			
	West Lothian	Scotland	% difference
Gross Annual pay - Full-time workers	£38,316	£39,719	-3.5%
Gross Annual pay - Part-time workers	£15,411	£15,609	-1.3%
Gross Weekly pay - Full-time workers	£762.10	£773.80	-1.5%
Gross Weekly pay - Part-time workers	£295.50	£293.70	0.6%
Gross Hourly pay - Full-time workers	£19.74	£20.26	-2.6%
Gross Hourly pay - Part-time workers	£14.18	£14.70	-3.5%

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2025

Full-time gross wage levels for West Lothian in the local workplace are generally just below the Scottish levels. The FT gross wage levels for West Lothian residents are just slightly higher than the Scottish average levels. Part-time wages remain close to the Scottish average for both residents and in the local workplace. Wage levels have had to keep pace with inflation over the last few years to

encourage applicants and ensure employee retention. However, with the increase in 2025 in employer National Insurance contributions, the minimum wage and the living wage, business cash flow have been impacted, together with the increasing impact of the Cost of doing business, which has resulted in a slowing in the recruitment market and in the rate of wage growth. This may reflect in a slowing down on wage growth, particularly given that the UK economy has been stuck in a cycle of slow growth for several years.

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 83.4% of males, below the Scottish pay gap level (89%).

Table 4c: Gross weekly pay by place of residence – male and female		
	West Lothian	Scotland
Gross Weekly pay - Male Full-time Workers	£819.90	£812.80
Gross Weekly pay - Female Full-time Workers	£683.70	£726.10
Female pay as % of Male	83.4%	89%

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2025

Part time jobs in West Lothian represent 30.3% of total jobs in 2024 (compared with 28.9% in 2022, 28% in 2020 and 32.9% in 2018). The West Lothian level of part-time jobs is also lower than the 33.1% recorded for Scotland and 30.8% for GB.

In-Work Poverty

- An estimated 12.9% of all jobs in West Lothian pay hourly rates below the living wage. This is a slightly higher rate than for Scotland as a whole at 11.3%.
- An estimated 14.2% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage which is higher than 11.3% for Scotland as a whole.

In-work poverty is not a localised issue – it is increasingly more common across Scotland: 6 in 10 people in poverty live in a household where someone works and nearly three-quarters of children in poverty do. The latest Poverty in Scotland 2025¹⁷ report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that in-work poverty has increased in Scotland with more than 60% of people in poverty having one or more person in their household in work. Nearly half of working families in poverty have all adults in employment. 73% of children in poverty have one or more of their parents in work and 33% of children in poverty have all of their parents in work.

People on low incomes often end up paying more for essential goods and services. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘poverty premium’. Examples of this include the increased likelihood that low income households will be reliant on more expensive pre-payment meters, will be unable to move to the best fuel tariffs, and will be unable to access consumer credit.¹⁸ There is also evidence that the prices of cheaper brands of food, drink and other grocery products increased much faster than more expensive varieties¹⁹ meaning that poorer households were harder hit by rising costs.

¹⁷ Joseph Rowntree Foundation - [Poverty in Scotland 2025](#)

¹⁸ Scottish Government (2024) - [A review of emerging evidence on the effects of the cost of living crisis on debt in Scotland](#)

¹⁹ IFS (2024) [Cheapflation and the rise of inflation inequality](#)

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 ageing 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.

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.

Table 5: 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
Total West Lothian	39	33	38	37

Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020, Scottish Government

Most deprived datazones (20%) in Blackburn, Fauldhouse and Whitburn comprise a third of all deprived areas in West Lothian (32%). These localities will be the focus of new UK Government funding under the [Pride in Place Programme](#), which will bring a resource of approximately £20 million over a 10-year period. A local neighbourhood board is to be established by mid-2026 to manage the Pride in Place programme to engage with the community and decide what the investment will be spent on in a wide range of regeneration projects.

7. Children and Families

Children in Low Income Families

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).

Table 6: 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.

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 7a: Percentage of Children in Child Poverty

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

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

Table 7b: 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) over 3 years	Percentage change over 3 years*
Scotland	1.4%	6.5%	-0.2%	-0.9%	-1.5%	-6.1%
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%
West Lothian	2.8%	13.1%	1.2%	5.2%	0.2%	0.8%
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; however, it will be abolished from April 2026.
- In-work poverty – the in-work Universal Credit claimant count increased by 167% between January 2020 and December 2025. At December 2025, in-work claimants made up 6% of the West Lothian working age population.
- Lone parent households – child poverty in lone parent families has been increasing in recent years. 43% of children in lone parent families were in poverty, higher than the rate for couple families (26%).
- The Cost of Living crisis increased child poverty due to rising food, energy and housing costs where low-come families are having to rely on food banks and going without essentials.

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 470,000 in April 2025. In the UK Government’s Autumn Budget 2025, it was announced that the two-child benefit cap would be abolished from April 2026. The UK Government’s Child Poverty Strategy [Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty](#) estimates that removing the cap will lift 450,000 children out of relative poverty within this parliament. Around two million children will live in households that will see an increase in income as a result of removing the two-child limit including 600,000 children in deep material poverty. The majority of families (59%) that will gain from the removal of the limit are already in work.

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. From April 2026, the Scottish Child Payment will be increased to £28.20 per week in line with inflation, however, the Poverty Alliance reported that in order to meet the child poverty target, the payment should be increased to £40 per week for every eligible child. From 2027/28 the Scottish Government will introduce a new Scottish Child Payment Premium for under ones. This will result in a total payment of £40 per week for every child in the household under one.

Nearly 9 in 10 children in poverty are in the Scottish Government’s ‘priority families’²⁰. These groups are rarely isolated, showing their intersecting nature of these groups: the majority of children in poverty (58%) were in 2 or more priority groups. Each type of family will have unique challenges:

- **Families where someone is disabled:** children in poverty where someone in the household is disabled are much less likely to have a parent in work. Less than 2 in 3 children in households in poverty where someone is disabled have someone in work (62%).
- **Single-parent families:** almost 70% of children in single-parent families are also in another priority group. Over 80% of children in a single-parent family are in receipt of a low-income benefit, and more than half of children in single-parent families in poverty have no one in work.
- **Families with a baby:** child poverty amongst families with babies has risen from around 24% in 2010–13 to 35% in the latest figures.

²⁰ Poverty in Scotland 2025 - Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

- **Large families:** children in large families have seen a steep rise in poverty rates since the introduction of the two-child limit, up to 41% in 2021–24 from 30% in 2013–16. They now make up nearly half of all children in poverty.
- **Minority ethnic families:** these families make up just 1 in 10 children in Scotland in 2021–24. However, they have the highest risk of child poverty of all of the priority groups, with nearly half (47%) trapped in poverty in 2021–24. This means that they make up 1 in 5 children in poverty.

8. Free School Meals and Clothing Grants

Table 8a: Uptake of Education Maintenance Allowance

Education Maintenance Allowance	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 to date
Applications Received	889	837	768	793	743	732	756	624	568
Numbers of applicants paid	842	785	703	743	684	635	672	580	572

Table 8b: Uptake of School Clothing Grant

School Clothing Grant	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 to date
Number of pupils paid	5,053	6,407	7,337	8,592	7,420	7,684	7,859	7,601	6,872
Number of applicants paid	3,888	3,818	4,405	5,173	4,565	4,739	5,179	5,089	4,363

Table 8c: Uptake of Free School Meals

Free School Meals	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 to date
Applications Received	5,210	5,254	5,344	5,322	4,962
Free School Meals Approved Nursery	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Free School Meals Approved P1 to P5	2,438 (through benefit)	2,517 (through benefit)	2,379 (through benefit)	2,089 (through benefit)	2,952 (through benefit)
Free School Meals Approved P6 to S6	3,221	3,480	3,411	3,283	4,043
Free School Meals Approved P6/P7 SCP				287	509

Source for Tables 8a – 8c: 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 last full financial year (2024/25), there has been a slight decrease in applications for these two benefits. Clothing Grant and Free School Meals has decreased again in the latest year (2025/26), however, this could be attributed to the data not being for the full financial year which will be updated again in April 2026. EMA applications increased in 2023/24, reversing the downward trend of the previous few years, however, uptake dropped again during 2024/25.

In previous Poverty Profile reports, Free School Meal uptake estimates were published through the School Healthy Living Survey which has now been discontinued. The Scottish Government now publish uptake rates through the School Meal Uptake estimates. The School Healthy Living Survey was a single-day snapshot of school meals and could be prone to random fluctuations from year to year. The new methodology takes the meal data for a full financial year. This leads to some differences between the estimates generated by each methodology. The current method consistently returns slightly lower uptake rates overall compared to the School Healthy Living Survey.

Using our local authority family group, we can see that West Lothian has the fourth highest uptake of Free School Meals. Local authorities that have a higher uptake rate are Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and South Lanarkshire. Local authorities with a lower uptake rate are Dumfries & Galloway, South Ayrshire, Fife and Renfrewshire.

Table 8d: Uptake of Free School Meals in Secondary Schools

Local Authority	2023-24
Clackmannanshire	73.1
Dumfries and Galloway	51.5
Falkirk	64.3
Fife	49
Renfrewshire	28
South Ayrshire	50.5
South Lanarkshire	58
West Lothian	53.5
Scotland	51.9

Source: Scottish Government, School Meal Uptake: 2023-24

9. Food Insecurity

The West Lothian Food Network was formed in Spring 2020 and is now composed of 19 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, 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 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 16,743. The majority of those being supported by the food network are working age people, however almost a quarter (24%) 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, the West Lothian Foodbank delivered 4,040 emergency food parcels to 7,313 people in West Lothian. This has decreased from 4,600 parcels distributed in 2023-24. The number of people receiving a food parcel in West Lothian has been decreasing since 2022-23. Looking at household composition, households with children received 1,270 food parcels (31.4%) compared to households without children which received 2,770 (68.6%) food parcels. Most food parcels went to single people (60.4%) followed by single parents (21.6%).

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 still remains high and has been attributed to a weakened social security system. The slight decrease in 2024-25 can be linked in some part to easing income pressures following the slowdown in the rising cost of essentials (easing inflation).

The Trussell Hunger in Scotland²¹ report shows that a significant proportion of the population in Scotland were experiencing food insecurity in 2024. One million people, including 210,000 children, lived in food insecure households which represents 15% of all Scottish households. Households in the most deprived areas of Scotland were three times as likely to be food insecure than households in the least deprived areas (26% vs 8%). Hunger was experienced disproportionately by particular groups across Scotland; 75% of people referred to food banks were disabled, 25% of children were growing up in food insecure households, 12% of people referred to food banks were from racialised communities, adults living alone made up 55% of people referred to food banks and 24% of people referred to food banks were in working households. The increase in food bank use has been a long-term trend, however, it was accelerated by the pandemic and the cost of living crisis over the last five years.

Research²² from Trussell shows that more than 14 million people, including 3.8 million children, faced hunger in the UK last year because they didn't have enough money for food. Last year 29% of emergency food parcels were provided for families with three or more children. Now that the UK Government has lifted the two-child limit, Trussell estimates that this will pull 470,000 children out of severe hunger and hardship by 2027.

Results from the Scottish Health Survey 2024 shows that 8% of adults worried about running out of food due to a lack of money or other resources, down from 14% in 2023 which was the highest level in the timeseries. 36% of adults in single parent households had worried that they would run out of food.

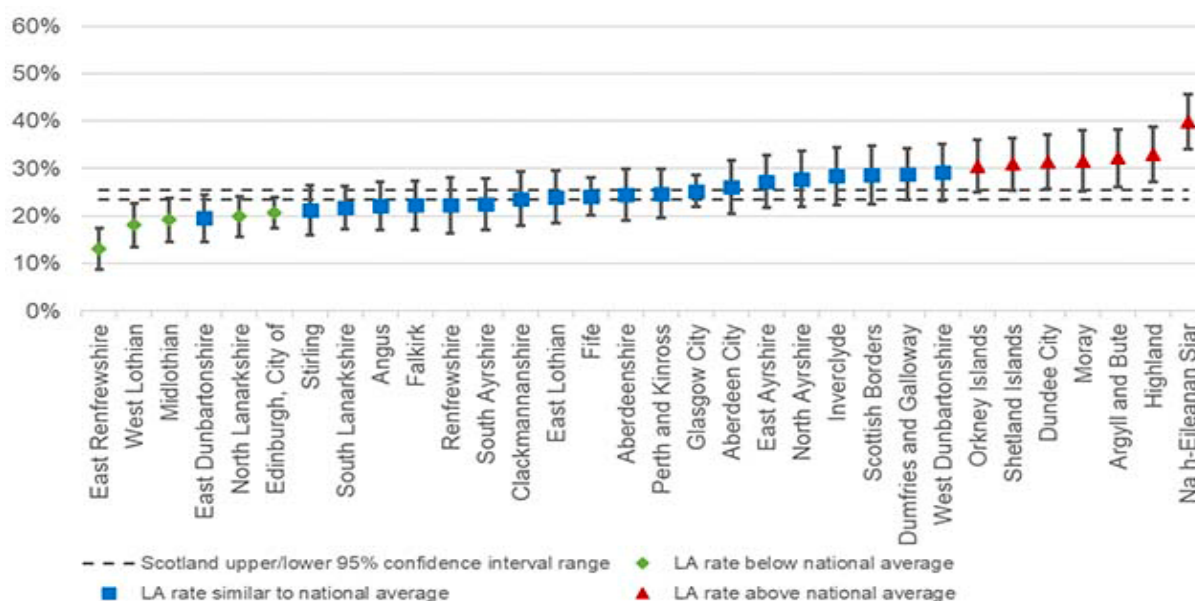
²¹ Hunger in Scotland – Trussell September 2025

²² Our response to the Autumn Budget and Child Poverty Strategy – Trussell December 2025

10. Fuel Poverty

Due to disruption from the Covid pandemic the latest local authority data is from 2019. However, in Scotland, fuel poverty rates decreased to 28.7% in 2024, down from 34% in 2023. Extreme fuel poverty rates decreased to 14% in 2024, down from 19.4% in 2023. In total, there are 732,000 fuel poor households in Scotland and the majority of fuel poor households (570,000) are also in income poverty.

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

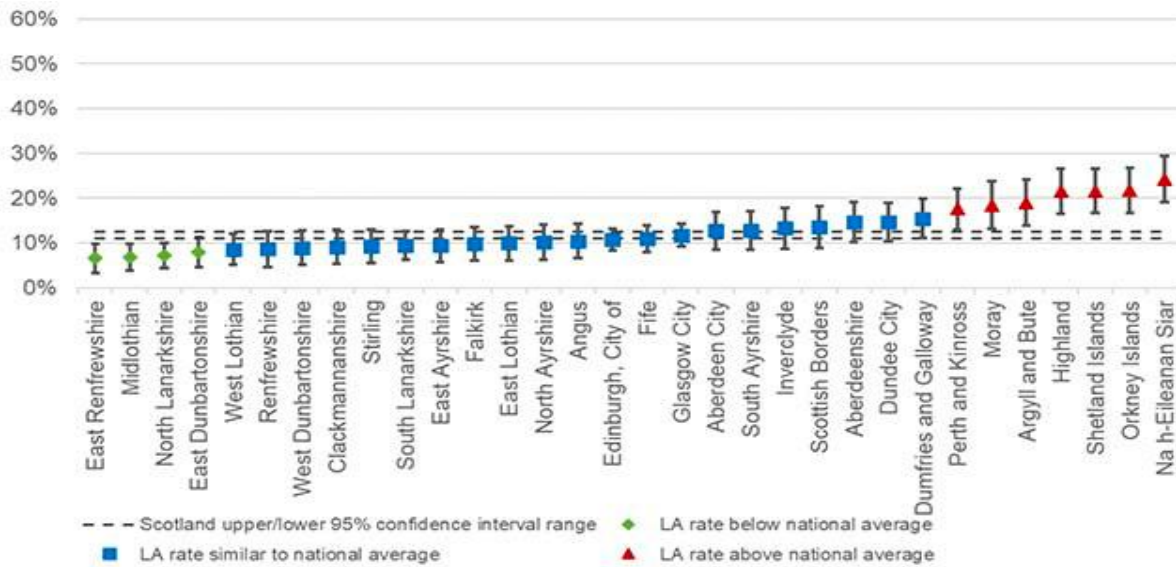


Source: Scottish Government, Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis 2017-2019

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%).

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%).

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

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).

The heating payment package in Scotland consists of the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment, the Winter Heating Payment and the Child Winter Heating Payment administered by Social Security Scotland. These payments are designed to help people with the cost of heating their home in the colder winter months. As of January 2026, over 1,508,000 payments have been issued for the heating payment package. This consists of over 1,009,000 Pension Age Winter Heating Payment, over 454,500 Winter Heating Payments and 44,000 Child Winter Heating Payments.

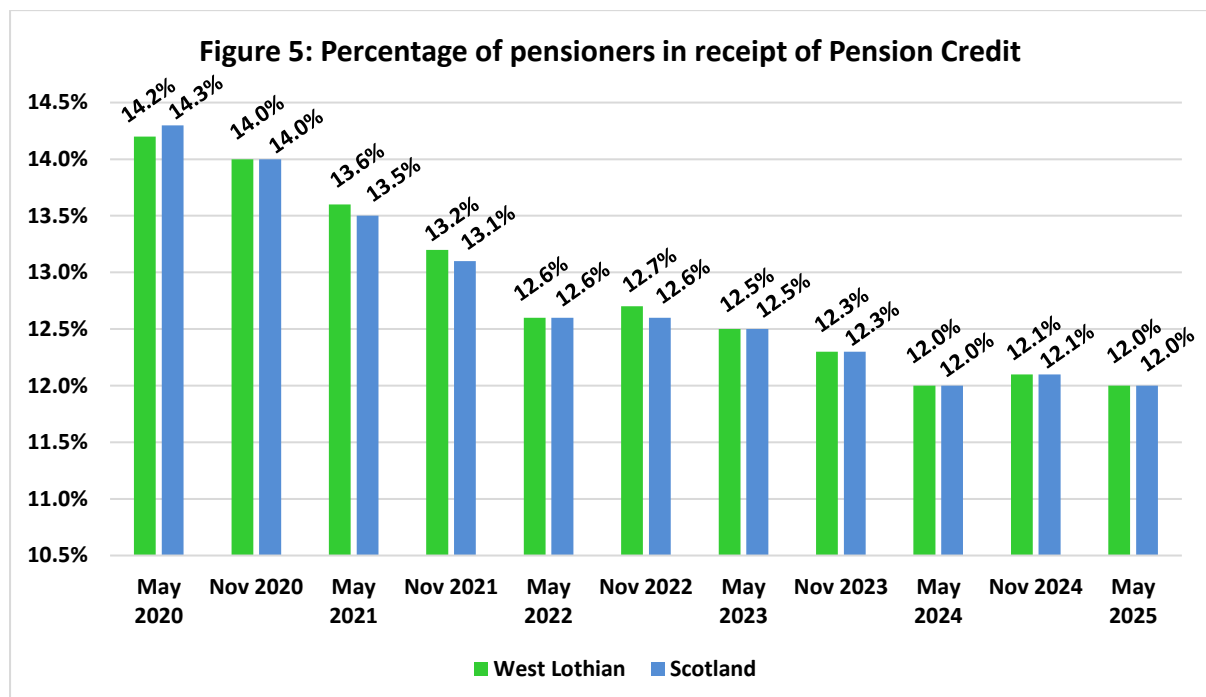
There is no local authority breakdown on Pension Age Winter Heating Payment statistics. However, In West Lothian, 15,735 Winter Heating Payments and 1,685 Child Winter Heating Payments were issued in Winter 2024/25.

11. Pensioners on Fixed / Low Income

There are 31,485 people in West Lothian receiving the state pension. Of these, 3,787 (12%) 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.

After the UK Government launched their Pension Credit campaign, over 56,000 households in the UK were awarded Pension Credit in one year (July 2024 – July 2025) compared to the previous year.



Source: DWP, StatXplore

Pensioner poverty has been rising with around 15% of pensioners (160,000) in Scotland experiencing relative poverty. 11% or 110,000 pensioners were in absolute poverty.

The report by The Living Wage Foundation, *Life on a Low Pension*²³, shows that in the UK, 54% of people on a low pension are sometimes or always struggling to keep up with bills and credit commitments. Income from the State Pension, a workplace pension and other savings are not enough to cover everything, with 35% of people relying on at least one other source of income, and 30% are in debt. Surprisingly, 42% of people on a low pension self-identified as middle or high earners during the majority of their working lives.

*Too Little, Too Late*²⁴ by Independent Age, tells us that about 225,000 pensioners in the UK receiving Pension Credit continue to live in poverty – this makes up 20% of Pension Credit recipients. This could

²³ Living Wage Foundation - [Life on a Low Pension, September 2025](#)

²⁴ Independent Age - [Too little, Too late - Experiences of income adequacy in later life, May 2025](#)

be related to housing costs not being met in full by Housing Benefit or where Housing Benefit has not or cannot be claimed. Housing costs leave people more at risk of poverty even if they receive all of the social security they are entitled to: 37% of older private renters and 28% of older social renters are in poverty. It is estimated that 700,000 older people are living in poverty but are ineligible for means-tested benefits.

12. Conclusions

The overall poverty picture outlined in this report suggests that West Lothian is experiencing levels of poverty and deprivation close to the overall Scottish average, but generally slightly lower than the UK.

A significant segment of the population experience challenging financial and material circumstances, with approximately 12.9% of jobs located within West Lothian paying hourly rates below the living wage level. 14.3% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage level compared to 11.3% for Scotland as a whole.

Fewer people are claiming out-of-work benefits and more people in employment than when the first Anti-Poverty strategy was developed in 2012. Local unemployment is 2.5% of the general working age population, and has remained stable over the last couple of years, and generally below both the Scottish and UK average. However, people who were in work but required financial support from Universal Credit (UC) as their income was not sufficient, increased by 167% between January 2020 and December 2025. In-work claimants make up 6% of the West Lothian working age population.

The number of economically inactive working-age adults who are out of the labour market because of long-term sickness or disability, has been consistently rising over the last seven years. There has also been an increasing number of young people falling out of work or education.

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.

Full-time wage levels for West Lothian in the local workplace are generally just below the Scottish levels. The FT wage levels for West Lothian residents are just slightly higher than the Scottish average levels. Part-time wages remain close to the Scottish average for both residents and in the local workplace. There remains a significant wage gap in West Lothian, with females in full-time employment earning 83.4% of males wage levels, which lags behind the Scottish pay gap level (89%). Employers have been increasingly impacted by the cost of doing business (increased national insurance, minimum wage levels and operational costs), directly resulting in a slowing of the rate of wage growth. Residents and those employed locally in West Lothian are likely to see an impact on wage levels in the coming year which may compound already existing financial difficulties within low-income households.

The majority of households accessing West Lothian Food Network community food providers were financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed. While the West Lothian Foodbank has seen an annual decrease in the delivery of emergency food parcels, the latest estimate saw 4,040 parcels delivered during 2024-25. A third of all households in receipt of food parcels were households with children (31.4%). Emergency food parcel provisions have remained high and attributed to a weakened social security system. It is expected that the local 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. In West Lothian one in six children (aged 0-15) are in a low-income household (16.4%). Figures for child poverty have remained high both locally and nationally, with 24.1% of children living in poverty in West Lothian in 2023/24, slightly higher than the Scottish average of 23%. The Cost of Living crisis has increased child poverty due to rising food, energy and housing costs, with low-income families increasingly relying on food banks and having to go without essentials.

The UK Government's 2-child cap policy child related benefits has been active since April 2017; however, it will be abolished from April 2026. It is estimated that removing the cap will lift 450,000 children out of relative poverty. The Scottish Child Payment which was rolled out in November 2022 to families with children under 16 now provides £28.20 per week per child. It is thought that it may have mitigated child poverty to some extent in Scotland by the extra financial help. This support payment will continue, and will introduce a premium payment for under ones from 2027/28. While this goes some way to help support low-income families, the Poverty Alliance estimates that to meet the child poverty target, the payment would need to reach £40 per week for every eligible child.

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.

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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