WEST LOTHIAN SERVICE USERS NEWSLETTER

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Hi! My name is Claire.

Welcome to my Newsletter!

I am a service user with a severe and enduring mental health problem, and I produce Newsletters to help share information about issues people may experience and support available in the West Lothian community.

I am a volunteer for the Mental Health Advocacy Project (MHAP) and a member of their Management Committee. I enjoy researching news and services. If you have any ideas you think may be of interest for future Newsletters, or if you have details about a local service please contact MHAP on 01506 857230 or email admin@mhap.org.uk

Health

Xcite leisure



The Xcite Ageing well project in West Lothian supports the over 50s to improve their physical health, mental health, and wellbeing. There is the opportunity to meet new people and enjoy yourself and the chance to try a range of activities, such as walking, dance, exercise, singing, knitting, and swimming. There is also a new chair yoga class for older people. For further information you can contact healthandwellbeing@westlothianleisure.com. Call 01506 237950 or visit www.westlothianleisure.com

The health and wellbeing team at Xcite works with health professionals such as GPs, mental health teams, and link workers to encourage people to become more active. They work with cardiac and pulmonary rehab and Macmillan cancer support link workers to improve a person's journey. The ultimate aim is to improve quality of life if a person has a long-term health condition. You can contact your health or social care professional to make a referral if you have a health condition, are not active or are already a member. There is a video on the Xcite website for more information on the referral process and to find out what other people have said about the programme. Funding for the community mental health and wellbeing fund has been expanded so it has made the delivery of a new programme possible for older adults across the county. At the moment there is a seated exercise class at the hub in Fauldhouse every Friday from 11.45 – 12.30 pm and it is free.

There are Parkinson's UK sessions funded by the Parkinsons Physical activity grant and the following activities are available.

- Falls prevention sessions which focus on strength and balance.
- Stationary cycling sessions to improve cardiovascular function.
- Circuit-based sessions to improve strength and power.

Sessions run in 12 week blocks and are free.

Diet information in West Lothian

West Lothian provides diet resources through the NHS and the local council. They offer healthy eating information and specialised support for weight management like NHS Lothian's Second Nature app/program. Dietetic services can be accessed via GP referral. You may have a condition such as diabetes. Local nutritionists are also available for personalised plans.

General healthy eating and lifestyle.



West Lothian council promotes healthy eating, reduced salt intake increased activity (150 minutes/week), and reduced alcohol consumption. You can visit their website.

The Eatwell guide is Scotland's guide for a balanced diet. The health improvement team in West Lothian works with local businesses to offer healthy eating options and provides training.



Weight management programmes.

Second Nature (NHS Lothian) Is a free 12 week digital programme with dietician support for long-term healthy habits and is accessed via an app.

Counterweight is an educational programme with 6 sessions over 3 months to help change eating/activity behaviours for weight loss.

Specialised dietetic support (referral required). West Lothian dietetics provides support for malnutrition, Diabetes, Gastroenterology, and paediatrics. Referral is via GPs or other health professionals.

You can contact the diabetes dietetic team directly to access programmes such as DESMOND programmes.

Private support is available from independent nutritionists may offer personalised plans, food diary analysis, and group classes.

So, To get started, for NHS support talk to your GP for referrals to dieticians or weight management programmes, check the west Lothian council website or use Food standards Scotland resources. For private help you can search for local registered dieticians or nutritionists in the West Lothian area.

Benefits and Finances

Youth Guarantee



Provision of a Youth Guarantee for young people. Training for under 25 apprenticeships will be completely free for small and medium sized enterprises. Government will be providing £820 million over the next three years to support young people and guarantee them a place in college, an apprenticeship or personalised job support and after 18 months, 18 -21 year olds will be offered paid work, not benefits.

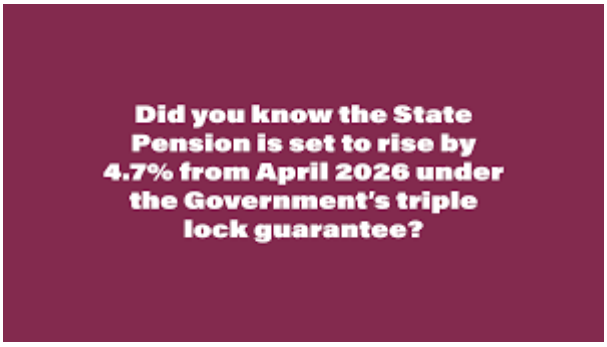
Child benefit update

The two-child benefit limit is being scrapped from April at a cost of £3 billion. This will reduce child poverty by 450,000 by 2029/30. This means that from spring, households who need extra support will be able to get it for all of their children, regardless of how many they have.

Rail fare freeze

Millions of commuters will benefit from a freeze in rale fares for the first time in 30 years so there will be no increase in season tickets, peak and off peak returns between major cities. Commuters on the more expensive routes will save more than £300 per year.

State pensions



The full state pension of £230.25 a week will go up by 4.8% to just over £184.90 thanks to the governments “triple lock” pledge, worth an extra £550 a year and older basic state pensions will increase by £440.The full state pension will increase by a minimum of 2.5% in future years, meaning in 2027/28 it will be at least £12,861. This is above the personal allowance of £12,570 which is already frozen until April 2028. For people whose only income is the full new state pension will face a tax charge on the excess, a minimum of £58 a year.

National Living and Minimum Wage

From April around 2.7 million workers will benefit from increases in the National living wage and National minimum wage. The National minimum wage is the lowest amount that workers are entitled to whereas the National living wage is for those aged 21 and over. The National living wage will rise 4.1% to £12.71 per hour and national minimum wage for 18 to 20 year olds will jump 8.5% to £10.85 per hour. Experts say the higher increase for younger people risks putting firms off hiring from this age group.

Carer support in Scotland



The carer's allowance (from DWP) has been fully replaced by the Carer support payment (CSP)for people in Scotland. If you were on carer's allowance, you should have been moved over. The carer Additional Person Payment (CAPP) is a new Scotland – only payment begins in March this year and is for carers who look after more than one person, worth up to £520 per year. The Scottish carer supplement (SCS) replaces the old carers allowance supplement and is paid weekly/4-weekly along with CSP instead of twice yearly giving more support.

Extended support after death. The period for receiving carer payment after the cared-for person dies extends from 8 to 12 weeks. The UK carers allowance is set to increase in April this year, and these increases also apply to Scottish payments.

If you already receive support Social Security Scotland (SSS) should have contacted you to move you to CSP and you will also receive the SCS. If you are new to carer benefits in Scotland you should apply for CSP through SSS instead of the old carer's Allowance The SCS is available for people who provide unpaid care in Scotland. You must receive the CSP and you do not need to apply for the supplement. The supplement is paid automatically every 6 months for 2025/26. It is worth £293.50 and is being paid in June and December. Payments will be made into the same bank account that your CSP is paid into. If you are eligible and haven't received the SCS or heard from SSS you can call them on 0800 182 2222.

The carer support payment in Scotland is £83.30 per week (around 360.96 monthly) for 2025/26. It is paid by SSS to people who provided regular care for at least 35 hours a week to someone receiving a disability benefit. There is an earnings limit of £196 per week for carers.

West Lothian mental health provides housing support for over 16s who have been diagnose with a mental health condition. It works with West Lothian health and social care partnership and mental health teams. It provides accommodation for those that cannot live independently. Staff are nearby and are there to offer direct support 24/7. Usually, those people who have been in a mental health ward or service. Outreach housing support is also provided.

Changes to the Motability scheme.

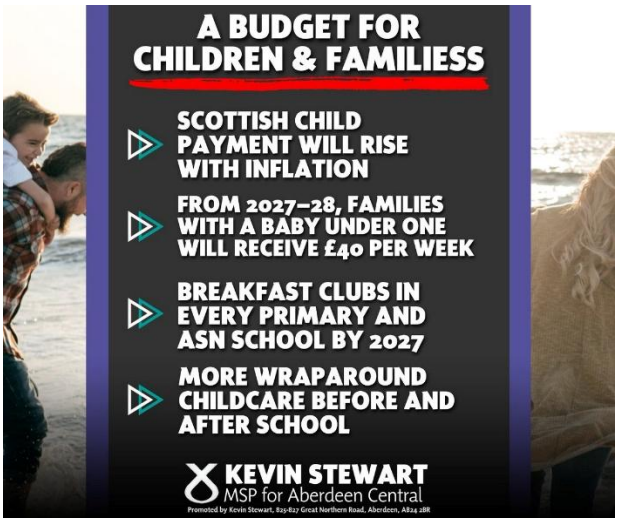


Changes to the Motability scheme are being brought in from July this year. Customers will pay VAT on upfront payments for most vehicles, though WAVs remain exempt. Luxury brands like BMW and Mercedes-Benz are being cut from the scheme with a focus on practical, affordable options. The standard annual mileage allowance will be lowered from 20,000 miles. Standard breakdown cover will no longer include overseas travel.

There are no changes to criteria for who can join the scheme. There will still be many vehicles available with no upfront cost. Your existing lease is unaffected. If you are getting a new vehicle from July this year you will see these changes. Motability will provide more details of the changes and engage with customers in Spring this year. So, from July tax changes and new leasing package elements take effect for new leases.

The Motability 5-mile rule. This means that named drivers for a Motability car really should live within 5 miles of the disabled customers home (for insurance purposes). Any exceptions will be considered for carers who provide essential care with extra information being required. There can be up to three named drivers (family, friends, carers) which can be added but they must meet insurance criteria. There are stricter limits for drivers under 25 years (i.e. specific care groups/power). Only one under 21 driver is allowed. The 5-mile rule is not related to the distance a disabled person can walk. The changes ensures that the Motability scheme remains flexible.

Scottish budget



The Scottish child payment will be increased to £40 a week for families with a baby under the age of one from 2027-28. The additional payment is expected to benefit around 12,000 children. An extra £600 million will be spent on social security assistance in 26-27. The total bill will therefore be £7.2 billion.

By 2027 there will be a breakfast club for every primary and special school child. There will be a "summer of sport," including free children's sport and swimming lessons for every primary school pupil.

In Scotland, all children in Primary 1-5 automatically gets free school meals. This also applies to some older students. For Primary 6 and 7 students qualifying depends on receiving benefits like Universal Credit, Scottish child payment, or other income-related benefits. You may need to apply via your local council to get free school meals and possibly clothing grants. You may also qualify for holiday food payments. There is an ongoing pilot run by the Scottish government to extend free school meals to more secondary school (S1-S3) pupils in certain areas to support struggling families.

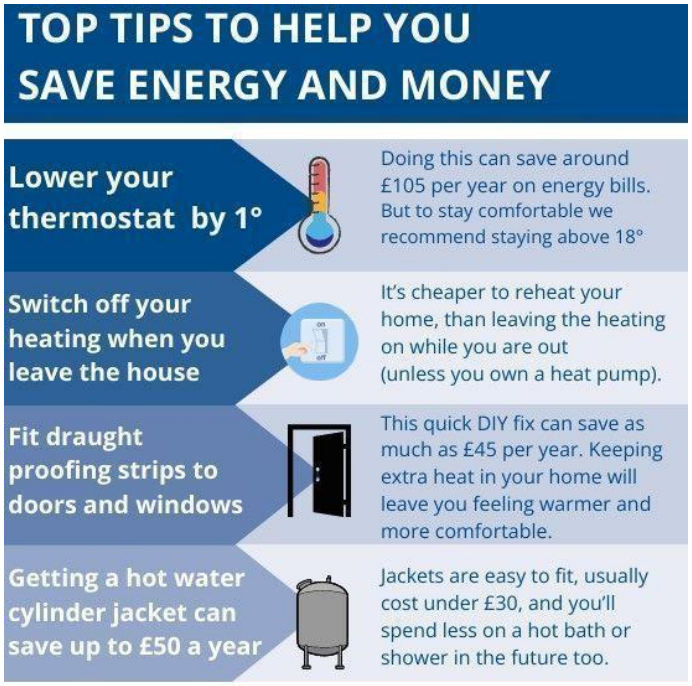
There is £22.5 billion for health and social care including funding to begin a national rollout of walk-in GP clinics.

Emergency support for families

More financial support is now available for struggling families in Scotland to combat child poverty. This includes £5.5 million for the Scottish welfare fund. This fund provides those on low incomes with emergency grants for those in crisis such as experiencing homelessness or issues with caring for someone. £1.5 million is being awarded to the Corra Foundation which provides funds for local organisations. In Scotland child poverty is being tackled through funding childcare, free school meals, and free bus travel for under 22s. An additional £1 million will support the Scottish governments National child poverty plan 2022-2026. This includes parental employability schemes, support for

women getting back into work. The charity Children's First will benefit from extra funding of £1.5 million to provide financial, practical, and emotional support. During the winter months many families struggle with the cost of living.

Energy information



Low temperatures may lead to problems with heating and hot water systems and the increasing chance of burst pipes which can damage properties. Experts advise keeping your thermostat at a steady temperature of between 18°C and 20°C during the winter months. To avoid frozen pipes, keep a minimum temperature of 10°C even when you are out. Insulating pipes in rooms that you do not heat or areas where there are exposed pipes can help guard against freezing pipes (pipe lagging).

You can save money on your energy bills by reducing your thermostat by 1°C. It will save you around £90 a year. WHO suggests that healthy adults require a temperature of 18°C. With the elderly or very young you should use a slightly warmer setting. If you have a combi boiler to save money you could lower the flow temperature. It is often set higher than necessary, but they work best at 60°C or below but it is often set at 70°C and 80°C. °install and can be removed after winter is over. You could therefore save around £104 off your bills. This glazing is a thin, transparent film applied to the frame with double-sided tape and a hairdryer. This creates an insulating air gap at very low cost. You could also use curtain liners or blankets to help retain heat in a room. At dusk, close your curtains and open them in the morning so the sun can heat the room. You could save more than £100 a year.

Experts say not to have your radiator valve any higher than 3 unless it is in the room where your thermostat is. If you set the valve to higher than 5 you could pay more for your

heating. In the bedrooms, keep the dial between 2 and 3 this will keep the room temperature to between 15 and 20°C and could save you money. If you are not going to be at home for a while, use the frost sign on your radiator. This will help prevent pipes from freezing. By bleeding and cleaning your radiators you can lower your energy bills.

Your radiator valve settings are as follows:

0-radiator is off

FROST icon 7°C

1-10°C

2-15°C

3-20°C

4-25°C

5-30°C.

If you place hot food directly in your freezer it could be increasing your energy bills. So, you should let it cool down first at room temperature for a maximum of one to two hours. If you don't the temperature in the freezer will increase rapidly and the freezer will be forced to work harder to cool down. You should ensure you set your freeze to between -18°C and -20°C.

Feature Organisations

Andys Man Club



Andy's Man Club is a men's suicide prevention charity that provides peer-to-peer support groups across the UK and online. The charity aims to challenge the stigma that exists around men's mental health. Men have the chance to share information about their lives and the challenges that they face in a safe environment. The group is entirely confidential. Meetings are every Monday at 7pm except Bank holidays. You can just turn up there is no need to book or pay any fees. You must be 18 years or over. You don't have to talk if you don't want to, there is no pressure. Groups run for around two hours and doors open at 18.45pm. Tea and refreshments are provided. By joining the club, you will become part of your community and meet new people.

You don't need to be diagnosed with a mental health condition to attend, everyone is welcome. Most venues are wheelchair accessible.

Groups run across West Lothian and includes Reconnect Regal Theatre, Bathgate, Craigsfarm community hub, Craigshill, Livingston, 10 Murieston Valley and Strathbrock Partnership Centre, Entrance B, Broxburn.

For any enquiries you can access the online form at https://andysmanclub.co.uk . The charity cannot provide mental health support. Also, on the website you can find out what groups are available near you.

For urgent help contact the Samaritans free anytime. Call 116 123

CALM You can call the helpline on 0800 585858 7hr a day, 7 days a week.

Call 111 free and select option 2 to be connected to a mental health professional.

For immediate risk to life call 999.

HomeAid

A new second-hand low-cost goods facility will soon open at Almond Housing Association's office in Craigshill. It is to be located in retail space on the ground floor.

HomeAid will be offering low cost items, including furniture and white goods, clothing, and bric-a-brac. It offers help to people facing social and economic exclusion in the West Lothian community which includes those who are homeless who are taking up tenancies in the county. This service has been running for 25 years and indeed, everyone is welcome to use the charity's services. This includes the vulnerable and people that want to have a nice home with everything that they need. A wide range of large and small second-hand items are up for sale, and this helps the charity raise much needed funds. There are two 'wee shop' stores in Bathgate and Broxburn that sells items such as books, clothes and toys, DVDs. There is also a furniture store in Bathgate and Craigshill, the new store is now open. They stock larger items such as sofas, tables, chairs, white goods, and beds. Some of these items are brand new. HomeAid collects large, donated items for free and also delivers purchases to your door for free.

Furniture donations can be done over the phone For the new store call 01506 652230. This service helps the environment. On Facebook there is a short video from the new store in Craigshill.

Check for updates on social media and HomeAid's website.

Music 4U



Music 4U is a therapy group for people suffering from Dementia. It meets in Livingston United Parish Church, Fell's Riggs, Carmondean, from 2-3.30pm on the 3rd Wednesday of every month. The last meeting was Wednesday 21st January. It is remarkable how music can transform lives. To find out more there is a short video on Facebook.

If you are interested in joining you can contact one of the groups organisers, Nancy Burgoyne. Tel: 01506 419904.

Voluntary Sector Gateway

West Lothian Foodbank



Shoppers at Tesco stores in Linlithgow and Bathgate donated food and money to West Lothian Foodbank. Over three days in November almost 1900kg of food were donated by customers meaning that around 4,500 meals were provided to struggling families in the West Lothian area. Nearly £1,700 was also collected allowing the Foodbank to stock up on any food items they are running low of.

People are referred to the foodbank through a number of agencies, which include West Lothian Council and Citizens Advice Bureau. Food parcels are provided to both individuals and families which include food to last for 3 to 5 days. Figures from 2024/25 indicate over 4,000 emergency parcels were distributed across West Lothian which helped over 7,000 people. For more information on how to donate food or money or to volunteer, visit www.westlothian.foodbank.org.uk

Volunteering

In this new year you could consider volunteering in your community. Volunteering can bring a routine into your life, connecting with others and increasing confidence. It allows you to give back to your community. There are many volunteering opportunities across West Lothian which you can fit around your daily life. If you would like to volunteer, you can register on the Voluntary Sector Gateway website and give them details of what you would like to do and when this would be. Visit www.voluntarysectorgateway.org/new-year-new-you-try-volunteering/

Community meals in Blackburn

The Larder is now providing a community meals service inn Blackburn allowing people to have access to delicious food at a good price. Clients will be able to have a three course meal for just £5, and this service started again in January. There is no referral needed and everyone is welcome. There is also a community meals service at Strathbrock Partnership centre in Broxburn on a Monday and Wednesday at 3.30pm.



Canine Partners virtual open days.

Canine Partners

Amazing dogs. Transforming lives.

Canine Partners is a charity that is hosting a series of virtual open days for people across Scotland. The virtual open days will allow people to learn more about the charity and how it can transform the lives of people with physical disabilities by providing trained assistance dogs. These dogs can offer support to clients with everyday tasks and promote independence and increasing confidence.

The virtual open days are held via Microsoft teams. Sessions are suitable for people that want to find out more about the charity or indeed want to become a volunteer or raise funds. You may be a community group, club, schools, and organisations.

Upcoming dates.

Monday 23rd February 2.30pm – 2pm

Saturday 27th June 10-11.30am

Thursday 19th November 6.30pm-8pm

If you would like to find out more and book your place you can visit the booking links on the Voluntary Sector Gateways website. Go to www.voluntarysectorgateway.org/canine-partners-virtual-open-days-scotland/

Carers of West Lothian

New workshops

Carers of West Lothian

Carers of West Lothian (CoWL) has new workshops for people who care for someone. They allow people to focus on their own health and wellbeing in a quiet setting. Activities include mindfulness and stress awareness training. These sessions are continuing due to their success. If you are interested, you can email Maureen or you can fill in a quick form on the CoWL website. https://cowl.org.uk/news/12/12/2025/caringforyou

Local news

Baby Boxes



More than 360,000 children in Scotland have benefited from the provision of baby boxes since it was introduced in 2017. Social Justice secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville has said “The baby box programme- the only one in the UK-shows our determination that every child, regardless of their circumstances, should get the best start in life. I would encourage anyone expecting to become a parent in 2026 to take advantage of the programme and sign up for a box-which can benefit them by £400 per child.

The application is done through a registered midwife and nine in ten parents with a newborn baby apply. At the moment contents of the box include breast pads, baby books, a carrier sling, three types of thermometers, a play mat, 15 items of clothing, a changing mat, and redeemable nappy vouchers. The contents of the box are now being reviewed to strengthen support provided. This will be completed by March this year. The scheme this year has received £8 million of funding.

New indoor adventure park



Flip Out is opening a new indoor adventure park, replacing the Paradise Island Golf unit in Livingston Designer Outlet. The opening date has not yet been confirmed but it will be

in the coming months. It has not yet been announced what exact activities will be on offer, but other locations provide E-karting, battle beams, trampolines, bumper cars, and soft play. There are activities to suit all ages. It also provides birthday parties of all age groups, groups, and sizes.

Volunteer mentors wanted



The mentoring charity McR Pathways urgently needs volunteer mentors in Broxburn Academy. Adults are asked to provide an hour each week. The role allows you to help young people to grow in confidence and deal with lives challenges. Full training and ongoing support is provided allowing the young person to make important choices and transform their lives. You can sign up on the charities website. Volunteers must complete five simple steps and no academic, professional, or special qualifications are needed. You must be over 21 years. PVG and reference checks are required. As a volunteer it is very rewarding to be able to help a young person reach their full potential.

To find out more or sign up as a volunteer mentor, visit www.mcrpathways.org/become-a-mentor

New soft play in West Lothian



There is going to be a new soft play and climbing frame and café in Bathgate, West Lothian. It is called Sandcastle soft play. It will have different zones catering for different age groups. The Café will serve fresh food and a variety of hot and cold drinks for Parents, carers, and children. It will be bringing new jobs to the area. The facility provides a warm, safe space for families and opens 26th February.

Events

Eonarium Enlightenment



A sound and light show is coming to Edinburgh. It is inspired by Vivaldi's Four Seasons and is taking place at McEwan Hall at the University of Edinburgh. There will be choreographed projections that transform the hall into a radiant, living canvas with breathtaking sound and visuals.

Entry fees.

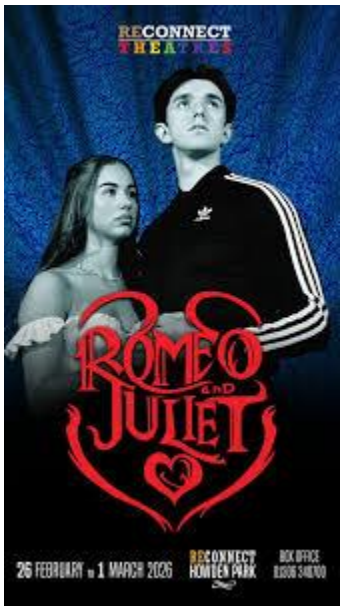
General admission (13+) £16.90

Child (5-12) £13.90

Student or senior (65+) £15.90.

Visit https://www.eonariumexperiences.com to select your date and time for February and March this year. The show lasts for 30 minutes, and the venue is wheelchair accessible.

Reconnect Howden Park centre, Romeo and Juliet



Romeo and Juliet is a new production and is directed by Sam Stuart Fraser. It tells the story of passion, conflict, and the tragic fate of two lovers. There is a vendetta between two powerful families and ends in tragedy for the couple. It is a fantastic production not to be missed in Howden Park Centre in Livingston.

The production runs from 26th February- 1st March 2026.

Tickets cost £21.00 + Booking Fee

For dates and times

Visit https://tickets.reconnectregal.com/EventAvailability

To purchase tickets:

Tel: 01506 340700 Box Office

Email: boxoffice@reconnectcharity.com

Website: https://www.howdenparkcentre.co.uk

Glasgow Riverside museum



Glasgow Riverside museum is offering a collection of replica props from some of the world's most famous movies, including Star Wars, ET, Gremlins Dr Who and Back to the Future. Dr Who props include K9 and Daleks and a DeLorian replica from Back to the Future. There are also intergalactic props from the galactic movie saga by George Lucus.

The exhibition opened on Saturday January 10th and ends on March 29th, 2026, and is free.



Useful contacts

Advice shop
Tel: 01506 283000
Website: www.westlothian.gov.uk

Breathing Space
Tel: 0800 83 85 87
Website: www.breathingspace.scot

Canine Partners
Tel: 03456 580 480
Website: https://www.caninepartners.org.uk
Email: info@caninepartners.org.uk

Carers of West Lothian
Tel: 01506 448000
Website: www.carers-westlothian.com
Email: office@carers-westlothian.com

Citizens Advice Bureau
Tel: 01506 432 977
Website: www.cabwestlothian.org.uk

West Lothian Council
Tel: 01506 280000
Website: www.westlothian.gov.uk
Email: customerservice@westlothian.gov.uk

Eonarium Enlightenment
Website: https://www.eonariumexperiences.com

West Lothian Foodbank
Tel: 0151 229307 opt 5
Website: https://westlothian.foodbank.org.uk
Email: info@westlothian.foodbank.org.uk

HomeAid Craigshill
Tel: 01506 652230
Website: https://www.homeaidwestlothian.org
Email: donation@homeaidwestlothian.org

Home energy Scotland
Tel: 0808 808 2282
Website: www.homeenergyscotland.org/winter

Howden Park centre
Tel: 01506 340 700 Box Office
Website: https://www.howdenparkcentre.co.uk
Email: boxoffice@reconnectcharity.com

Riverside museum
Tel: 0141 287 4350
Website: https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk
Email: info@glasgowlife.org.uk

Samaritans
Tel: 116 123(free)
Website: www.samaritans.org
Email: jo@samaritans.org

Voluntary sector gateway
Tel: 01506 650111
Website: www.voluntarysectorgateway.org
Email: vsg@vsgwl.org

Westspace West Lothian
Website: www.westspace.org.uk
Email: westspace@health-in-mind.org.uk

Xcite Health & Wellbeing
Tel: 01506 237950
Website: https://www.westlothianleisure.com
Email: healthandwellbeing@westlothianleisure.com