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

Health

Endometriosis



Most women will have to cope with cramps, bleeding, and fluctuating hormone levels every month. Unfortunately increasing numbers of women experience abnormal symptoms which could be due to a chronic disease called endometriosis. Endometriosis occurs when the tissue that lines the womb to appear in other locations within the body. This can lead to pain, inflammation, and scarring. Now in the UK, it takes around nine years to get a diagnosis. Many women are living in terrible pain. There are four red flags that may indicate endometriosis.

The timing of cramps is significant. Endometriosis pain can begin several days before bleeding starts whereas with a normal period cramps begin at the start or just before a period begins. Pain with endometriosis may persist after the end of a period or indeed, throughout the whole month. Endometriosis pain is severe, deep, stabbing or burning which can extend into the lower back, hips, or legs. Another sign of endometriosis is that taking paracetamol or ibuprofen for period pain doesn't work as well or not at all. There are other signs of endometriosis that may be experienced during a period. These include

opening of bowels or passing urine, severe bloating, fatigue or nausea, fainting, and vomiting. Some women with endometriosis only experience minimal pain and note not all period pain is endometriosis. Other conditions can cause similar symptoms such as fibroids, pelvic infections, or ovarian cysts.

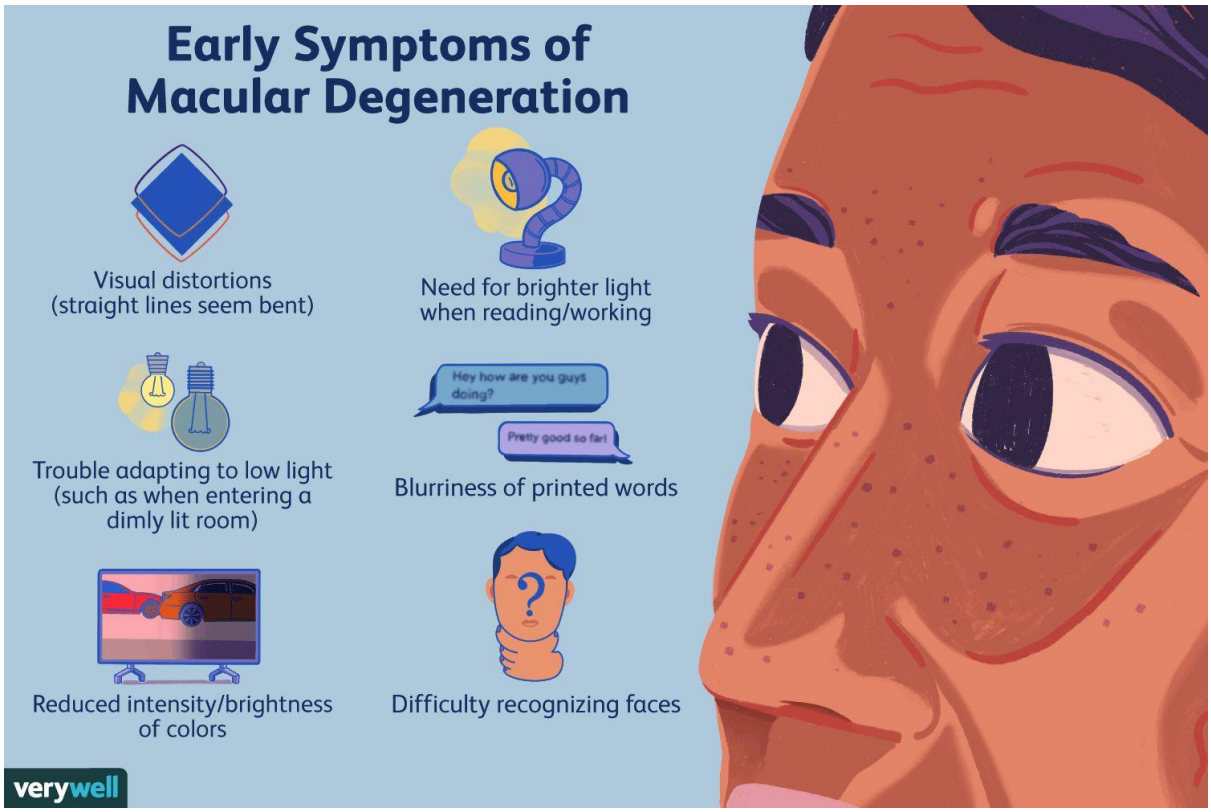
Sources of information and help for endometriosis.

- Endometriosis UK provides a free, confidential helpline. 0808 808 2227. They offer an online community and local support groups across Scotland.
- Endo Warriers West Lothian. A group launched in 2017 runs monthly meetings, often at St. John's Hospital and also offers 24/7 support via private Facebook groups.
- NHS inform is a good source of information on endometriosis symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options within Scotland.
- EXPPECT Endometriosis service is based at the Simpson centre of reproductive health (Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh). The team provides specialised multi-professional care and runs a comprehensive website with patient resources.
- Your GP can refer you to specialised services if needed.

Resources.

- Mental health/pain support. Pain association Scotland has details of pain management groups.
- Citizen's Advice Scotland has advice on financial, or employment issues related to the condition.
- The Alliance and Scottish Government have produced a "understanding endometriosis" resource pack for patients.

Age related Macular degeneration (AMD)



A common condition that effects the middle part of your vision is Age related macular degeneration. (AMD). Although it doesn't cause you to lose your sight it can affect ability to read and recognising faces can become difficult. If AMD is not treated your vision could deteriorate further. There is not a precise cause of AMD. Factors involved include ageing, smoking, high blood pressure, obesity, and a family history. Symptoms can develop over several years and then deteriorate quickly over a few weeks or months. It can affect one or both eyes. Symptoms include

- Blurry or distorted area in your vision
- Being sensitive to bright lights
- Flickering or flashing lights
- Hallucinations

AMD is not a painful condition to have, and your eyes will still look the same. If you have any concerns see an optician right away as early diagnosis and treatment could stop your vision from deteriorating further. You must see an optician urgently or call NHS 111 if

- your vision gets worse suddenly
- You have a dark 'curtain' or shadow moving across your vision
- Your eye is red and painful

Symptoms could be due to other eye problems that require urgent treatment. You can also get help from 111 online.

An optician may be able to detect AMD before symptoms appear so regular eye tests are vital. If you are over 60 years you will qualify for a free eye test every two years.

Support services/Local groups

Autism support course



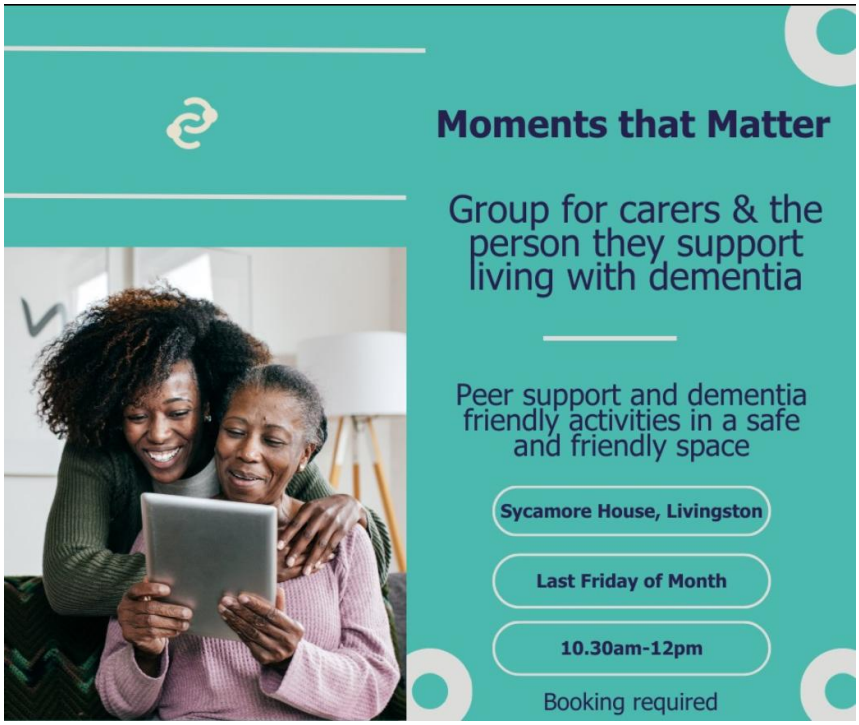
There is a free Autism online support course available. It is fully funded and 100% online. The course takes 8-12 weeks and there is free one-to-one advice and guidance. The course introduces autism and explores theories, diagnosis and investigates support, communication, interaction, behaviour and healthy and fulfilled lives. There is a certificate that is awarded which is comparable to level 5 SCQF. There is Fasttrack enrolment online which takes under 10 minutes. The course is for those 16 years and over. For more information and to get started visit www.freecoursesinscotland.co.uk You can speak to an advisor via live chat or freephone 0800 001 5910.

First steps playgroup



The First steps playgroup, based in Eliburn is the only ASN setting for 2-5 year olds in West Lothian. Despite rumours spaces will be available at the August intake and is now open to enquiries. They provide specialist care, developmental play, and support for parents. You can find out more by calling 07840 758 914 or Email: firststeps92@outlook.com.

Moments that matter group



Moments that matter is a new group being delivered by Carers of West Lothian. It is for people with mild to moderate dementia and their carers. It is running on the last Friday of the month from 10.30-12pm. It provides the opportunity for peer support and engaging in enjoyable activities (carers can join in). Staff and volunteers offer support and refreshments are provided. The group is taking place at Sycamore house, Quarrywood court, Livingston. To confirm your attendance or for any questions you may have you can contact Carers of West Lothian. Call 01506 448 000 or email: support@carers-westlothian.com The website is www.cowl.org.uk

Nicola's support group



Move for your mind group



Blackburn social group



Dad's Space


CoWL
Dad's Space
you a dad, stepdad, grandad or kinship carer of a child under 17 with additional needs?
king for a bit of time out and a chance to talk with people who get it?
me along to our monthly Dad's Space group for a brew in a friendly, supportive setting.
et other dads, swap ideas, and find out what support CoWL can offer.
Hope to see you there!
3rd Wednesday of month
10.00-11.30
The Chain Runner
Almondvale Way
Livingston
support@carers-westlothian.com
01506 448 000
07719064930

General news

Driving and eye tests



Millions of drivers support plans to bring in mandatory eye tests for those over 70 years. A recent poll equates to around 37 million drivers. This is part of a new road safety strategy. Driving lets elderly people keep their independence, but it is still necessary that these drivers can drive safely. Just now a person of any age can be fined up to £1,000 and three penalty points if their eyesight doesn't meet the legal standard. It is the case that some people have not had an eye test in the past two years. An alarming finding is that around 5.5 million people have never had an eye test.

UK rules. Drivers must read a post-2001 number plate and have a visual acuity of at least 6/12(decimal 0.5) on a Snellen chart with both eyes open, using glasses or contact lenses if required. If you do not wear your glasses or contact lenses whilst driving and you have an accident your insurance may not pay out. Eyesight can worsen gradually so you may not be aware that you no longer meet driving standards. This is why it is so important to have an eye test every two years.

It may be that if you develop an eye condition you may no longer be able to drive safely.

You need to notify DVLA if any of the following apply

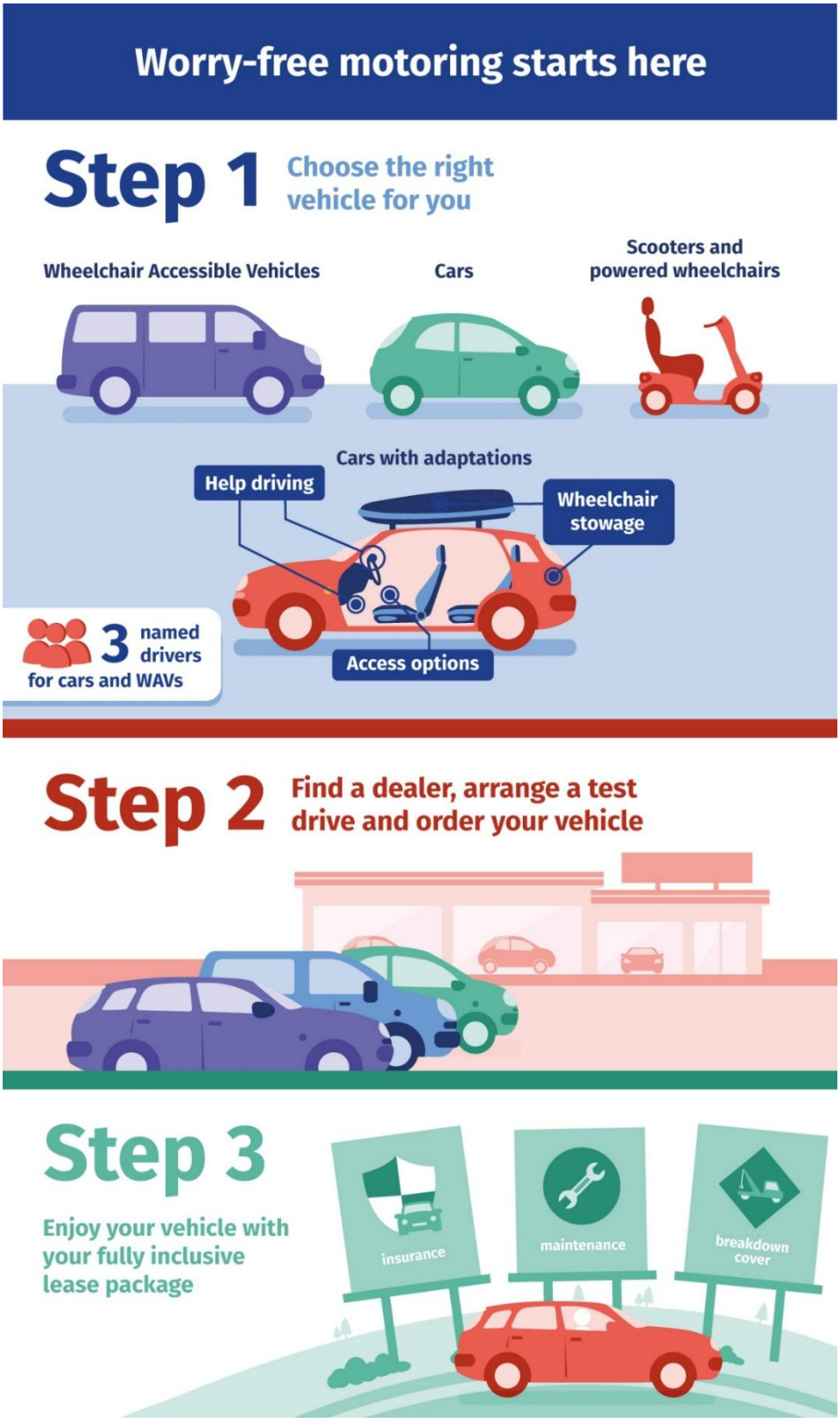
- Your eye condition affects both eyes
- You have retinitis pigmentosa affecting one or both eyes
- A GP or optician or eye specialist has said you should not drive

If you have any of these eye problems, you can report them to the DVLA online.

There are other conditions that may affect your ability to drive safely. They can include

- Diabetes or taking insulin
- Syncope (fainting)
- Stroke
- Heart conditions.

Motability scheme insurance



The Motability scheme is a vital service for disabled people and families and allows access to cars, wheelchair-accessible vehicles, scooters, or powered wheelchairs. The scheme arranges insurance through Direct Line Motability. You must be aware of exclusions that mean you may have to pay costs. Those eligible for the scheme can use part of their enhanced mobility award for a qualifying disability benefit. No one gets a free car and often an extra payment is required. People get a full care package when they lease a car from Motability and are covered by s range of services which includes maintenance, breakdown cover, insurance and sometimes, MOTs. Direct line motability offers financial protection if an accident happens. Up to three drivers can be added to the policy. Insurance can include a replacement car if yours is stolen or damaged, Personal accident cover of up to £5,000, loss of keys, adaptations, and modifications you agreed with us. Items not covered by motability insurance (which you think would be) include your excess payment (you must pay this before repairs start), loss of personal belongings and damage to the interior of the car.

You can contact the Motability scheme customer service team on 0300 456 4566. You can also talk to someone using web messenger.

Blue badge scheme



The blue badge scheme allows people to park more easily, and it facilitates travel for those with mobility issues. Blue badge holders will have access to disabled parking bays, free parking in certain areas and exemptions including single or double yellow lines (up

to three hours) where no loading restrictions apply. You cannot park at bus stops, taxi ranks or loading bays or In pedestrian zones or on clearways and anywhere that causes obstruction or danger. Your local council manages the scheme. In Scotland, a blue badge costs up to £20.

You can apply for the scheme if you are on certain benefits such as ADP and Scottish Adult DLA and receive the higher rate mobility component, are registered blind, or receive war pensioners mobility supplement or armed forces compensation benefits. You can also apply if you have difficulty walking or ability to operate pay-and-display machines. You may have a hidden disability such as dementia, autism or Parkinson's that puts you at risk to yourself or others. You may suffer from severe anxiety or difficulty in public spaces.

You can apply for a blue badge online at www.mygov.scot . Having a badge maintains independence and you can park throughout the UK. In some European countries they recognise the blue badge. How to avoid common mistakes.

- Do not let anyone use your badge when you are not present
- Displaying the badge incorrectly
- Using an expired badge (it must be renewed every three years).

It is important that people make use of the blue badge scheme but that they use it correctly as well. It lets people travel and park more easily and allows them to live their lives day-to-day and attend events.

People that hold a blue badge in Scotland may be eligible for a travel boost. So, If a person has a disability in Scotland, they could be entitled to free bus journeys with a National Entitlement Card (NEC). Usually, qualification for a NEC depends on the level of award for a disability benefit such as ADP or CDP. Now, you may also qualify with a blue badge. Guidance is available on the transport Scotland website. If you don't have a blue badge, you can access details on eligibility for the NEC card on www.mygov.Scot

Eligibility for a NEC card. You must receive a qualifying DWP benefit or a SSS benefit such as Pension age disability payment, ADP or receive the higher or middle rate of the care component of CDP.

Those with a blue badge may also now qualify for a disabled person's railcard. The eligibility criteria has been extended to now include a wider range of visible and non-visible disabilities. The disabled person's railcard gives people a third off rail tickets. The average person will save £126 a year. For one year it costs £20, or £54 for three years. This discount also applies to an additional traveller, over 16 who is with you.

Your carer ID card is a physical durable ID card that allows you to identify yourself as a carer. The following information is included on the card.



Carers card UK

The carers card and app is for anyone that looks after someone. It enables people to get online discounts, advice, wellbeing content and more. It provides photo ID, free companion tickets at over 500 UK venues, discounts at more than 300 high street brands and wellbeing support. Included on the card are up to two emergency contact numbers displayed. QR codes are available to access your emergency plan and proof documents. Exclusive discounts for carers include 10% off when dining out and you can also save on your shopping. With the card you also qualify for gym discounts with up to 25% off at over 4,000 gyms, leisure centres and health clubs and boot camps. There is a wellbeing hub with access to free online exercise classes, videos, and audiobooks. With the app there are digital tools and wellbeing support. It is also a digital ID card. The card itself costs £8 for two years.

Local news

West Lothian mental health fund



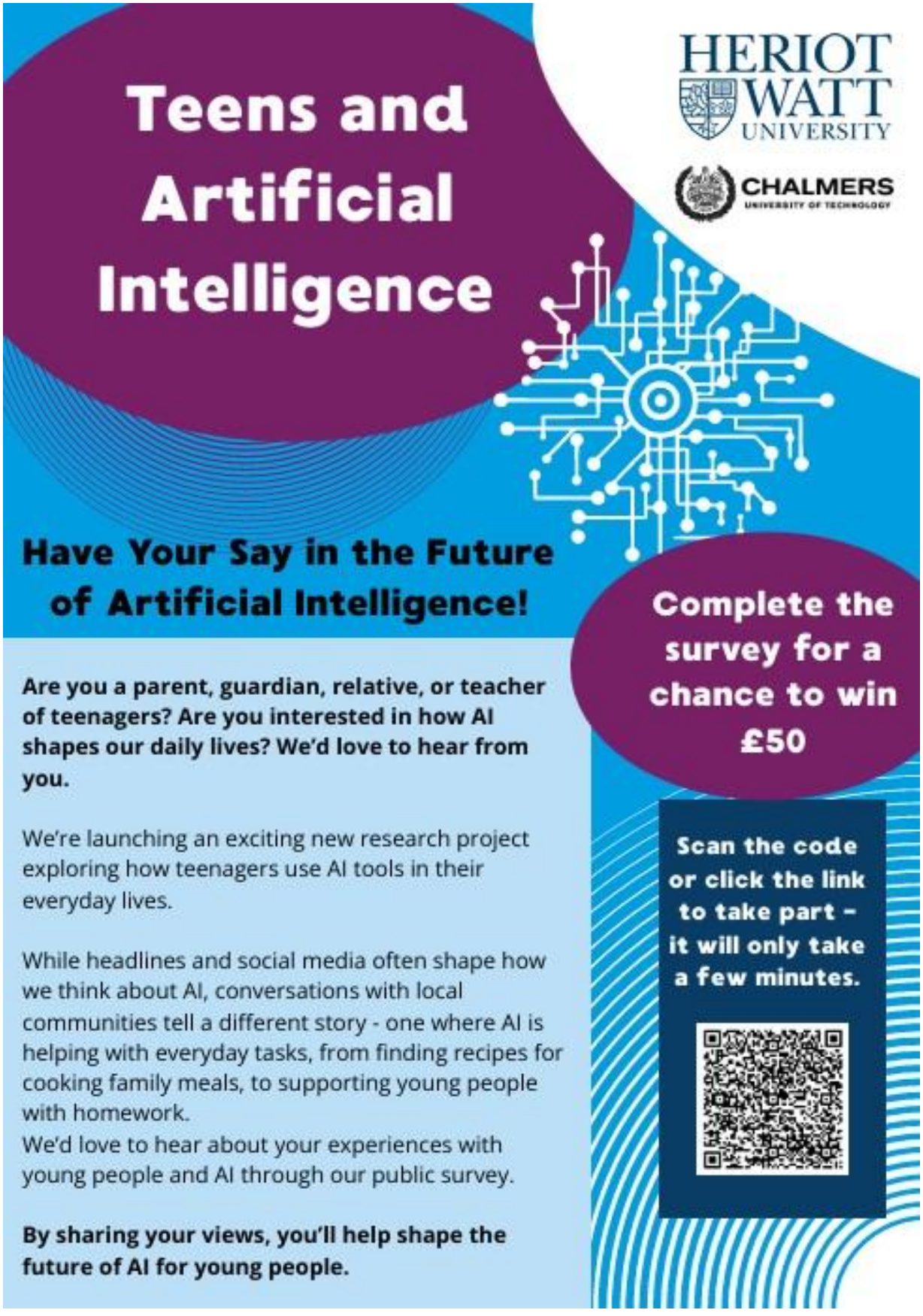
The West Lothian mental health fund is in its fifth year. £100,000 extra money has been made available from Holyrood although this will still not meet demand. The VSG team has received 76 applications for funding totalling more than £1.5 million. The fund is there to support people with mental health and wellbeing, those experiencing loss of a loved one or those who are socially isolated. Funds are also aimed at women experiencing gender based violence, those from a minority ethnic background and those with neurological conditions. Awards were made to 44 groups with 32 getting two year awards. Total funds provided was £559,000. In the past years £2.5 million has been allocated to community groups.

NHS Lothian funding



Record funding has been provided by the Scottish government for NHS and social care in NHS Lothian. This is an increase of 8.9%. It was decided in February and includes £2.4 billion bill for primary care, including £36 million for new walk-in GP services. The first launched in Edinburgh. The aim is to revolutionise access to GP services. The Scottish government hopes to reduce waiting times, increase numbers of operations carried out and increasing the numbers of GPs.

Heriot Watt Survey



Benefits/finance

State pension age increase



The state pension age is due to rise in April this year. This means that carers will be worse off to the value of £7,000. Many will have to survive on unemployment benefits if they can't work. In April, the state pension age will increase by one month and will gradually rise until it reaches 67 in March 2028. This will result in 820,000 66 year olds will no longer qualify for the state pension and other support such as Pension credit. For working-age carers who get the carer element of UC will get £134.82 per week less than those who get Pension credit which means they will be £7,000 worse off each year. So, the effect of increasing the state pension age by one year means that unpaid carers will have an extra year on working age benefits. The reason given for an increase in life expectancy has gone up but it doesn't necessarily mean that a person is fit to work. Ultimately more people will be living in poverty. One solution would be to continue paying benefits such as Pension credit to 66 year olds. Other sources of financial help include increasing the minimum wage and the warm-home discount.

Changes to disability benefits



Disability benefits are set to rise from April in line with inflation by 3.8%. Basic and new state pensions will rise by 4.8%. Carer's allowance will increase from £83.30 to £86.45. In addition, the earnings threshold will also increase from £196 to £204. This threshold states the maximum someone can earn each week whilst still getting carer's allowance. If this amount is exceeded by any amount payments can be reduced or stopped. Carer's allowance may also interact with other benefits the carer or indeed the person they care for receives and it becomes taxable if the total annual income is more than the standard £12,570 Personal allowance. This allowance figure is frozen until April 5th, 2031. These changes mean that carers don't have to reduce their hours when the national living wage increases. Pension credit moves to £238 per week for single

pensioners and £363 for couples protecting those on lowest incomes. More retired people will now qualify for Pension Credit. ESA will increase for those in the support group will get a rise from around £140.55 to around £145.90. Couples and those on premiums will also get similar increases along with those in the work related activity group.



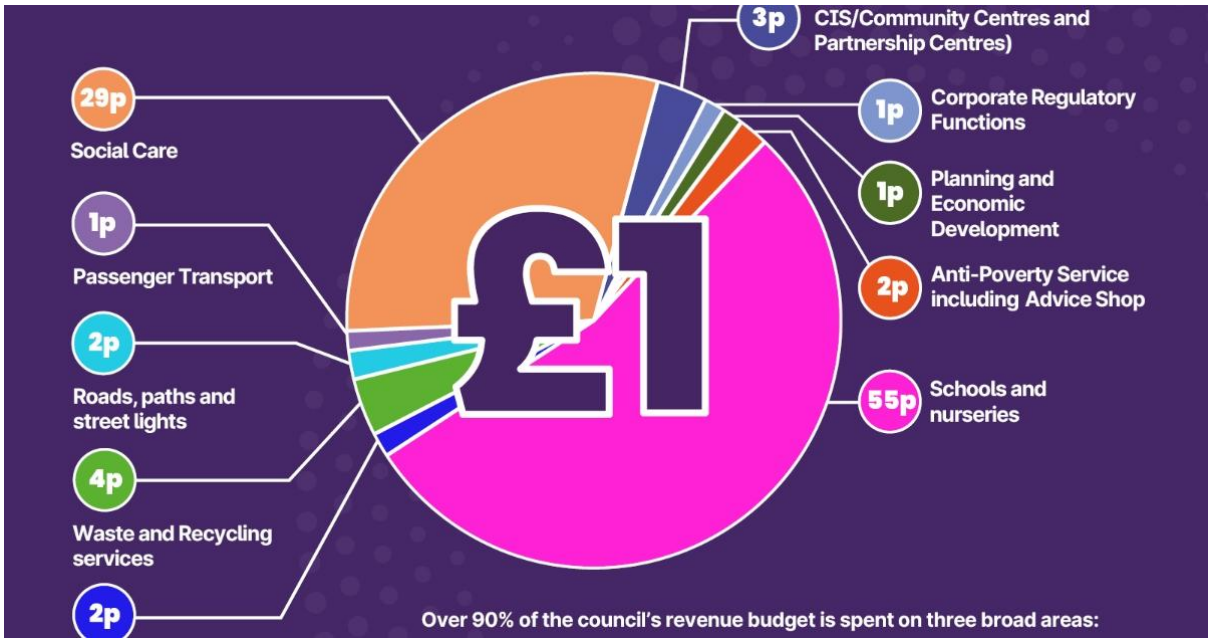
Universal credit health element reforms.

From April 6th there will be a 50% cut in the health element for most new claims. This means a reduction from £423.27 to £217.26 per month. It will remain in place until 2030. A new protected group is being introduced for people with severe, lifelong conditions. This higher rate will be around £429.08, and no routine reassessments will take place. For people already getting the health element before the 6th April they will remain at the higher rate. In April, the UC standard Allowance is set to increase for couples, single people, and those under 25 years old. The cap on child elements in UC will be scrapped from April. This will help larger families with disabilities. Those who rent privately may struggle as UC will not cover rising rents.

For those people receiving legacy benefits (such as income-related ESA) will move to UC by 2028 For those receiving ESA and who are migrating to UC after April there is transitional protection. This ensures that your UC award is the same as your ESA amount. Claimants who are being migrated will receive a formal migration notice so check for letters advising you to move. For ESA reassessments in early 2026 if you are found fit to work you must claim UC. If you provide strong medical evidence and attend your assessments is important so you are not being found fit for work incorrectly.

You can get advice about benefits from the West Lothian Advice shop. Call 01506 283000.

Council tax increase



It has been confirmed that West Lothian council tax will increase by 7.4% from April this year. This will apply to all bands. How it affects people; There will be an increase of £1.44 to £1.92 for bands A-C. Yearly Council tax figures for Band A £1,085.06, Band B £1,265.90, Band C £1,446.75. Over 60% of taxpayers fall into these bands. Band D rate is £2.16 per week. This increase amounts to £1,627.59. Band H properties will see an increase of £274.74 increasing the yearly charge to £3,987.60.

Additional funds will be spent on adult social care services, education, operational services (roads, waste, open spaces, parks, litter collection, bus services, school meals etc. Key areas identified for extra funding include adult and older people social care services, Potholes, and road defects. Other areas of significant investment include community buildings (libraries and partnership centres) advice shop and support services. In West Lothian there is an increasing demand for services and the higher costs of delivering services. In the long term solutions to the financial crisis that the council faces lies with Scottish Government. On the council's website there are details of changes to services that will happen and areas of key investment. Visit www.westlothian.gov.uk .

Over 450,000 households are getting support via the council tax reduction scheme which is only available in Scotland. It supports those on a lower income or claiming benefits, middle-earners and struggling households. If you are having difficulties paying contact your council and let them know. They may be able to put your account on 'hold' and agree a future payment date to help you out. Also available on the council's website is cost of living support information. Qualifying benefits include UC, Pension credit, and JSA. For details on how to apply and eligibility visit the council's website or access Government resources at www.gov.uk

If you agree to pay by Direct Debit, you have the option of paying council tax over 12 months instead of the usual 10 months. It is worth checking to see if you could be exempt from paying council tax. This includes if you are a full time student, you live in a care home or hospital or have a severe mental impairment such as dementia. You should contact West Lothian to apply for an exemption. You may be able to get a reduction in your council tax as part of the council tax reduction scheme. The exact amount will depend on your circumstances. This includes if you live alone, if you are a carer, if you live with someone under 18 or a student. Factors affecting the final amount If you get the guarantee include the benefits you receive, age, income, savings and who you live with. If you get the guarantee part of Pension credit you may not need to pay any council tax. If you can pay the entire council tax bill in one sum your council may give you a discount.

Volunteering

Pathways to volunteering course



The Pathways to volunteering course gives the opportunity to build skills, confidence, and experience. It introduces volunteering and helps you explore opportunities that match your interests, strengths, and goals. There is the option to work towards SQA Level 3 award in preparing to volunteer. For further information or to sign up, email: volunteering@westlothian.gov.uk

Ranger service volunteering.



There is an opportunity to get involved with volunteering with West Lothian to take part in regular volunteer sessions across country parks and green spaces. Volunteers have the chance to enjoy the outdoors, meet others, and improve the local environment. Green spaces include Beecraigs, Almondell and Calderwood country park and Polkemmet country park. Groups meet on a regular basis.

- Friends of Almondell and Calderwood meet on the first Saturday of each month
- Friends of Polkemmet meet every 2nd month on a Sunday.
- Friends of Beecraigs and Witchcraig meet alternating Saturday/Sunday each month
- Conservation volunteers meet every Thursday and alternating weekend sessions across West Lothian.

You do not need to attend every session you can just book an individual session. Various tasks include litter picking, pond work, path maintenance, and improvement. Everyone is welcome, including families. Sessions improve wellbeing and provides the opportunity to connect with nature. For any questions you can contact the ranger service at rangerservice@westlothian.gov.uk.

Local Groups/Events

Tai chi for carers



Carers of West Lothian is offering Tai chi for carers. It provides the opportunity to relax. It involves seated movements, combining mindful movement, breathing techniques and simple exercises that are suitable for everyone. No experience is required for this class. It is running in a 6 week block from 24th June -29th July. To book your place visit www.eventbrite.co.uk You must be over 21 years old and should commit to all six sessions as much as possible. The class will be at Sycamore house, Livingston and free parking is available.

Reconnect theatres Bathgate Regal



This show is a story of resilience, second chances and refusing to let your beginnings define your future. It is the life story of award-winning actor and producer Scott kyle (Outlander, The Angel's share, Billy and Tim) It blends intimate storytelling with animations. It is taking place at Bathgate Regal theatre on the 17th April at 7.30pm. Tickets cost £20 plus booking fee. For tickets visit www.reconnecttheatres.com

Scottish child minding association



On the 16th May this year the Scottish childminding association (scma) is holding its annual conference which is live event via zoom. It covers updates of childminding in Scotland, interesting topics and engaging speakers and practical tips for you to use. There will be two breakout groups for you to choose from. For updates on speakers and the programme for the day you can visit Facebook or visit www.app.childminding.org/CdZvrqsv to book your place.

Local hiking project



There is a free 7 week hiking programme which aims to build belonging, confidence, and connection outdoors. It has been organised by the Stonyburn and Bents future vision group, which is based at the Hub, Stonyburn workshops, Stonyburn, Bathgate. It is running on the following dates: 07, 14, 21, 28 July and the 04,11,18 Aug. You must be over 18 years. Fully trained walk leaders will be present during the programme. For more information and for advice and support you can call 01506 374132 or Email: laura.sbfvg@gmail.com. You can also visit www.sbfvg.com .



Useful contacts

Advice shop	01506 283000 www.westlothian.gov.uk
Autism support course	0800 001 5910 www.freecoursesinscotland.co.uk
Breathing Space	0800 83 85 87 www.breathingspace.scot
Carers card	www.carerscarduk.co.uk
Carers of West Lothian	01506 448000 www.carers-westlothian.com
Citizens Advice Bureau	01506 432 977 www.cabwestlothian.org.uk
West Lothian Council	01506 280000 www.westlothian.gov.uk
Cyrenians OPAL	01506 815 815
First steps playgroup	07840 758 914 Firststeps92@outlook.com
Generation Arts	07521 358 239 www.generationarts.co.uk
Nicola's supporting women	www.nicolas-supporting-women.com
Pathways to volunteering course	volunteering@westlothian.gov.uk
Ranger service	www.westlothian.gov.uk
Reconnect theatres	01506 639 000 www.reconnecttheatres.com
Samaritans	116 123 www.samaritans.org
Scottish childminding association	01786 449063 www.app.childminding.org/CdZvrqsv
Stonyburn & Bents future vision group	01506 374132 www.sbvg.com
Voluntary Sector Gateway	01506 650 111 www.voluntarysectorgateway.org
Westspace West Lothian	www.westspace.org.uk