WEST LOTHIAN SERVICE USERS NEWSLETTER

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October 2026 issue

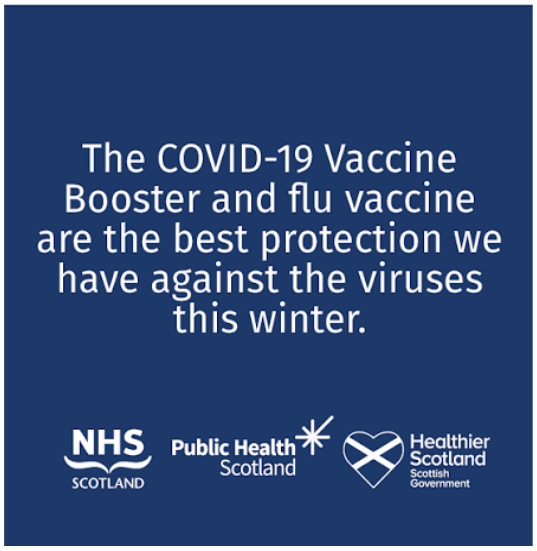
Hi! My name is Claire.

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



Winter Vaccinations

This winter's vaccination programme offers protection from serious illness from flu and Covid-19 and is available from September 2026. You may be offered a flu vaccine a Covid vaccination or both as eligibility is different.

Full list of Brits eligible for the free NHS flu jab or nasal spray

- Over 65s
- Aged 18 to 64 with certain long-term heart conditions (such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or liver disease)
- Pregnant women
- Care home residents
- Carers (those who are the main carer for older or disabled people at risk and those receiving a carer's allowance)
- Close contacts to vulnerable people
- Frontline health and social care workers
- Rough sleepers and homeless shelter users aged 16 and over
- Children aged two and three-years-old – offered the nasal spray
- School-aged children (from Reception to Year 11) – offered the nasal spray

People are being advised not to contact their GP practice as NHS Scotland will contact you. This may be a letter, e mail or text message. You will be notified of details of your

appointment or how to book your appointment. Your appointment may not be your GP practice. It is organised by local NHS immunisation teams. You can check winter vaccination eligibility on NHS inform. If NHS Scotland has contacted, you to book your vaccination you can use the NHS Scotland online booking service. If you are unable to book online you can contact the National vaccination helpline on **0800 030 8013**. It is open Monday-Friday 9-6pm and Saturday 9am -1pm.

The flu vaccination is offered as some people are at a greater risk of complications from flu. Indeed, the virus can change each year and protection reduces over time. Eligible children and young people will also be offered the vaccine. Children at primary and secondary school will usually receive the vaccine at school.

You will be offered the Covid-19 vaccine if you are at a high risk of serious illness.

This year the vaccine is strictly reserved for those at highest risk of serious illness. Unlike the flu jab the free NHS Covid-19 booster is no longer offered automatically to all adults over 65 years, healthy , pregnant women, carers, of frontline health and social care workers. There is the option of paying for a private booster at participating pharmacies.

The specific groups eligible for a free COVID-19 jab are:

- Adults aged 75 and over: This includes anyone who turns 75 by 31 January 2027.
- Residents in care homes for older adults.
- Individuals aged 6 months and older who are immunosuppressed: This includes people with severely weakened immune systems due to conditions or treatments such as:
    - Cancer treatments (chemotherapy or radiotherapy).
    - Organ, bone marrow, or stem cell transplants.
    - Genetic disorders affecting the immune system.
    - Conditions like HIV.
    - Long-term systemic steroids or immunosuppressive biological therapies.

More information is available on NHS Inform about both vaccines and eligibility and appointments.

New GP walk-in service



A new GP walk-in service is set to open in Livingston. It is one of 24 areas that will be operating this new service. This means that people can see a GP or nurse quickly without needing an appointment. This new service hasn't launched yet. It will focus on urgent, same day minor illnesses such as infections, rashes, and acute pain. There will therefore be a focus on urgent, on-the-day primary care needs. The service will be open from 12pm to 8pm seven days a week. It is hoped that this will reduce pressure on GP Practices and hospital A & E departments. People will therefore be able to avoid an 8am rush for GP appointments. Since February more than 10,500 walk-in-cases have been seen and is an important investment in local healthcare.

Benefits

Child winter heating payment



This year child winter heating payments will be given to 44,200 disabled children in Scotland. The payment is rising from £255.80 to £265.50 for 2026/27 and is only available in Scotland. It is for disabled children and young people under 19 years old. They must receive certain benefits to qualify. The payments are made automatically by Social Security Scotland (SSS) with no need to apply. The payments will be made from October and throughout the winter months. Qualifying benefits include the highest rate care component of child disability payment and the enhanced rate care component of ADP. People must receive a qualifying benefit on at least one day during the qualifying week in September. If a young person was in hospital or residential care during the qualifying week, they may still be eligible. Payments are made for each child who qualifies so, for a family with two children may get £531. This does not affect any other benefits received. People will be notified by letter before the payment is made. This benefit was introduced to offer help to families with additional heating costs over the winter. The payment is not affected by temperature, and the money can be spent on

anything with no need to provide any evidence or receipts. Full information about child winter heating payment can be found on mygov.scot.

Scottish child payment



Scottish child payment is increasing to £40 a week for children under one. This will benefit around 12,000 children who are eligible and will start in the 2027/28 financial year. The current standard rate pay is £26.70 per week per child per week which is paid as £106.80 or £112.80 every 4 weeks depending on exact uprating cycles. Children under 16 who receive certain benefits will qualify. You can check for more information or apply via Social Security Scotland on the mygov.scot Scottish child payment portal. You should apply for the payment as soon as possible as payments are made from the exact date your application is received by SSS. You can apply at any time for children under 16 even if you are waiting on the result of a qualifying benefit such as Universal credit. There are several ways you can apply. You can go online and apply through the mygov.scot Scottish child payment portal which takes around 10-20 minutes. You can call SSS free on **0800 1822222**. You can apply by post by downloading a paper form from mygov.scot or request a form via phone. If you already get the payment for a child and wish to add another you can report a change online rather than starting a new application.

For help with filling out an application for Scottish child payment, you can contact the West Lothian Advice shop on **01506 283000**. If you want to speak to someone in person there are appointments and drop-in sessions at council venues across the county. You can check locations and times on the Advice shop visiting page. The Citizens advice Bureau(CAB) also offers free advice and can help you fill in necessary forms. You can call **01506 432 977**. There are also drop-ins (no appointment) on Tuesdays (10-3pm), Thursdays(10-3pm) Saturdays (10-12pm). To make an appointment use the online portal at CAB West Lothian. SSS staff are available in West Lothian communities and can even visit your home if required. To book call **0800 182 2222**.

Pension age winter heating payment



Pensioners in Scotland could receive between £105.55 and £316.70 through the Pension age winter heating payment. This Social Security Scotland payment has replaced the winter fuel payment in Scotland. To qualify a person must be born on or before June 27th, 1960, and have lived in Scotland on at least the last day of the qualifying week. The exact amount is dependent on age and circumstances during the qualifying week. This includes the age of other eligible people they live with, and benefits received, such as Pension credit and income-related ESA. The qualifying week is Monday, 21st September to Sunday 27th September. You do not need to apply for this payment; it is usually paid automatically. Payments will begin from November and will continue throughout the winter. Those who qualify will get a letter before the payment is made. Some people may need to apply. Full information can be found on mygov.scot. The payment is based on individual income. If this is more than £35,000 HMRC will recover the money through the tax system. There is an online form for opting out of the payment which is available until October 19/2026.

Changes to child maintenance service payments



DWP has new plans to change how Child maintenance service (CMS) payments are calculated. Additional reforms include a reduced threshold at which changes in income can affect the calculation of the payment. Any changes will happen much more quickly. The government also intends to remove Direct pay, where payments are made directly between two parents and to introduce a collect and pay system. This is when the CMS collects payments from the parent that is paying the payment and passes them on to the receiving parent. As a result, any missed payments can be identified and

acted upon more quickly. To tackle child maintenance arrears administrative liability orders will replace the court-based process meaning that action will be taken sooner. Further modernisation of CMS is also planned to include changes to online services, case handling, and communications with parents. If a parent provides credible evidence that income has been misrepresented, a case can be referred to the CMS financial investigation unit who will decide upon a revised maintenance liability. For more information visit www.childmaintenanceexplained.org.uk

Crisis and community care grants



Last year in West Lothian more than 9,000 people applied for crisis grants from the Scottish welfare fund with the council paying out over £610,000. The grant is a one-off payment which does not need to be paid back. In total 5,670 individuals or families received a crisis grant in West Lothian last year. You can apply for a crisis grant if you are aged 16 years or over and on a low income and are facing an emergency or disaster. To qualify you don't need to be claiming benefits, as long as your income is similar to a person that receives UC, JSA or Pension credit you are very likely to be considered. Emergencies include situations such as having a gap in receiving benefits, losing income, escaping domestic abuse, or needing emergency food, gas or electricity. You can usually get only a maximum of three grants over 12 months. To apply for a crisis grant you must contact West Lothian Council. Due to a high number of applications, it may take longer than 2 working days to get a decision. You can apply online by accessing the West Lothian Council Scotland welfare fund online for. You need to give your reason by including the words "crisis" or "disaster." If you require any help completing the form you can contact the council on **01506 280000** Monday-Thursday 8.30am-5pm, Friday 8.30-4pm. As part of the application, you must provide 30-day bank printouts for all accounts in your household as well as proof of address.

The community care grant helps people on a low income to maintain their home and live independently. Awards are made as goods or vouchers not cash. Suppliers supply, deliver, and install white goods, including washing machines, fridges, freezers, and

cookers. People can also get furniture, and essentials such as bedding, sofas, and floor coverings. The grant also can cover costs associated with removal, storage, or essential travel. To qualify for the payment, you may be leaving care, prison or hospital, exceptional family pressure such as escaping domestic abuse or managing chronic illness/disability. The grant may prevent institutional care or homelessness. To qualify you must also be 16 years or over and on a low income, such as receiving UC, Pension credit, JSA or ESA. If you or your partner have savings that are more than £700 (if under state pension age) or £1,200 (if over pension age). There is no limit on the number of care grants you can get each year although you usually cannot reapply for the same items within 28 days. You can apply online using the West Lothian Council Scottish Welfare Fund portal. You must select community care grant. It normally takes around 15 working days. When your case is ready to be assessed a welfare fund officer will contact you. You must provide 30 day bank printouts and a copy of your tenancy agreement. Some energy suppliers such as E.ON Next or British Gas supply appliances to vulnerable households.

Energy information



Ofgem's price cap is set to increase from 1st October to 31st December 2026. This is an increase from £1,663 to £1,723. This will affect millions of people across the UK. The exact amount you pay still depends on how much gas or electricity you use. If you use more, you pay more.

In the home, electric showers, tumble dryers, and ovens require a lot of energy to run. You can reduce how much energy you use by having a short shower, air drying clothes and cooking several things at once in the oven. If you use a low power setting and a low-flow showerhead will reduce water and electricity used. You can save energy by spinning clothes at a higher speed in the washing machine then air-drying on racks or lines. You can therefore keep the dryer for emergency loads. With ovens, batch cooking several meals at once, using fan settings, switching to smaller appliances such as an air fryer or microwave can all save money. Vampire devices such as internet routers, T.Vs on standby, games consoles, set-top boxes, smart speakers, and chargers all use energy around the clock. This means that as much as 10 to 15% of a yearly energy bill is due to these devices. If you use a switched multi-plug extension costing around £8.50 allows you to cut power to several devices in the one go. Many modern routers and set-top boxes allows you to set timed wi-fi schedules so they will automatically power down overnight .You can use your smart meters in-home display to discover which appliances are using the most energy. To do this switch off groups of appliances at the wall or via their power strip. Any large

drop in the live kW reading will indicate what is using the most energy. For more information about support with paying bills visit www.westlothian.gov.uk/scottish-welfare-fund

Other tips to save money.

Another common way to waste energy is boiling too much water. If you overfill by just ½ litre a day amounts to around 365l of excess heated water every year. If you leave the lights on in rooms you are not using you can also waste energy particularly if they are left on for long periods of time. You can also turn down the flow temperature of your boiler to save on energy. A flow temperature of 60°C is often recommended as a starting point. The ideal setting will depend on your specific heating system and property. If you have a conventional boiler with a hot water cylinder, there will be a single dial or setting to adjust. With a combi boiler (without a hot water cylinder) there will be two dials or settings, one for radiators and one for hot water. Before making any changes, you can take a photo or record how the settings are configured. With a combi boiler you can lower the temperature as much as you want without affecting your hot water supply. 60°C is a good starting point.

Local groups

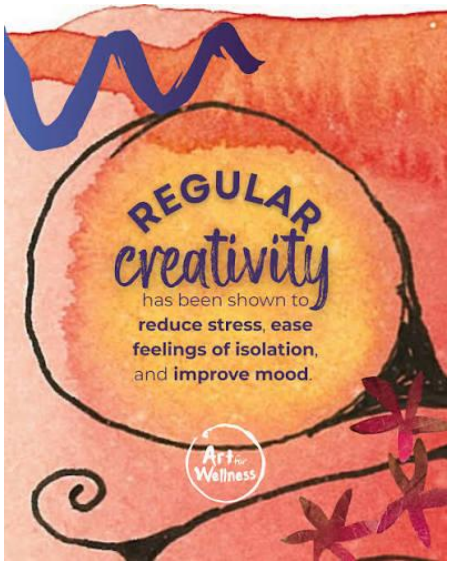
Breathwork circle Linlithgow



Breathwork circle, located in Linlithgow runs a monthly community group focusing on conscious breathing practices, guided relaxation to music, somatic grounding, and nervous system resets and with a free cup of herbal tea. No experience is necessary. It is taking place on Friday 13th November 26th from 10.15am to 11.30am in the Linlithgow Guide hall. It is recommended you arrive 5min before the session starts. Note that the event is held upstairs with no lift access. You are advised to bring a yoga mat or blanket, water bottle, and optional journal.

You can reserve your spot on the Eventbrite website. You can contact Michelle Gregory through the Facebook page, and she will send you booking details.

New charity WECreatif Arts and Wellness Hub



WECreatif Arts and Wellness Hub is a new charity which aims to improve wellbeing, reduce social isolation and promoting inclusion through arts and cultural activities. It is located on Kirkton South Road in Livingston. It has been founded by Joan Toall, owner of WEXPRESIF. It will offer arts, crafts, photography, printmaking, textiles and visual journaling, design workshops, youth engagement projects, community events and wellbeing programmes for children, young people adults and groups. Groups can be booked as a block or there are pay as you go activities.

The launch day will take place at the new hub on 17th October 11am-3pm. For more information visit weccreatif.awh@outlook.com

You yoga studio and wellness hub, Carmondean



The You Yoga studio and wellness hub, Carmondean, Livingston is hosting a Friday night unwind on 13th November and Sunday stress release on 29th November at 7pm. The aim is to offer meditation workshops designed to reduce stress heading into winter. The venue accommodates up to 20 students and is for everyone. Equipment is provided. The hub also hosts specialised events run by independent groups. Local instructors, particularly Yoga by Serena also use the hub. She offers accessible seasonal and chair Yoga every Wednesday, monthly Yin yoga and myofascial release and online seasonal yoga classes via zoom on Monday evenings. For more information you can email info@chooseyouyoga.co.uk or book via www.chooseyouyoga.co.uk

New Addiction support group



You Do Matter West Lothian Family Support group is for families and friends affected by a loved one's addiction. It is taking place at West Lothian college every Tuesday from 6-8pm. For fuller information contact youdomatter27@yahoo.com.

Local news

Banking hub Bathgate update



A banking hub operated by Cash Access UK has moved to a new location in Bathgate. It is now at 4 King Street EH48 1AX. It is open Monday-Friday 9-5pm. It includes a Post office counter for everyday banking such as cash deposits, withdrawals, payments, and managing accounts. Further services available include account support such as:

- opening, closing and replacements for cheques or credit books.
- Payment and money transfer assistance.
- Card and Pin management

- Help with online and telephone banking
- Fraud support and registering third-party access or support needs

Community bankers are available Wednesday 9-5pm. To deal with complex face-to-face enquiries.

Steps to Hope charity campaign



The charity Steps to Hope was founded in 2018 and started with the founder Richie Roncero handing out hats and gloves to people sleeping rough. It has since grown into a homelessness and addiction recovery service. It is based in several locations across Edinburgh and West Lothian. The residential facility, Hope House is located in Uphall, Broxburn and opened in 2024. The latest campaign will involve the founder Richie Roncero sleeping rough in 26 UK cities over 26 weeks from October 17th this year. The aim is to fund a five bed expansion to Hope House and to pay for its running costs for a year. Locations have been chosen by supporters on social media and includes locations across Scotland, England and Wales and Northern Ireland. The current 10 bed programme is not meeting demand with 50 assessments conducted every month. The charity offers a 12-step based abstinence programme and accepts both self-referrals and agency referrals from across the UK. More than 60 people have graduated from the programme. Previously, Richie completed an 8-week rough sleeping challenge which raised £240,000. This new challenge will see Richie arrive in each city with no money, one set of clothes, a sleeping bag, toothbrush, and phone. He will then beg for money.

It is expected that Richie will experience fluctuations in his mental health and experience depression and anxiety along with a lack of sleep. You can hear more about the challenge and donate and follow on the Steps to Hope Facebook page.

Events

West Lothian Halloween fundraiser for Dementia UK



There is a Halloween charity night supporting Dementia UK taking place at the Stirrup Stane, Willow grove, Craigshill, Livingston. It is taking place on Friday October 30, 2026, from 7pm – 1am. There will be a disco, raffle prizes, indoor horse racing, and a best costume competition. Fancy dress is not compulsory.

The music of Coldplay



The music of Coldplay features world class vocalists and a live band performed by candlelight. You will experience their biggest hits such as Sky full of stars, Yellow, and the Scientist. Doors will open at 6.45pm. . If you have a disability or health condition you may qualify for a companion ticket. For details of ticket prices and to book visit www.concertsbycandlelight.com You can also check eligibility for a companion ticket on the website.

West Lothian Yoga and Wellbeing festival Craigsfarm





Useful contacts

Advice shop	01506 283000 ww.westlothian.gov.uk
Breathing Space	0800 83 85 87 www.breathingspace.scot
Citizens Advice Bureau	01506 432 977 www.cabwestlothian.org.uk
Coldplay by candlelight	www.boxoffice.concertsbycandlelight.com
Craigsfarm community hub	01506 894 639 www.craigsfarm.org.uk
West Lothian Council	01506 280000 www.westlothian.gov.uk
Home energy Scotland	0808 808 2282 www.homeenergyscotland.org
Samaritans	116 123 www.samaritans.org
Steps to hope	07949 838 666 www.stepstohope.co.uk
WEcreatif Arts and wellness	Wecreatif.awh@outlook.com
Westspace West Lothian	www.westspace.org.uk
Voluntary Sector Gateway	01506 650 111 www.voluntarysectorgateway.org
You Do Matter family support	07980 932949 Joyce.mcphee66@sky.com
You Yoga studio	07810 824 195 www.chooseyouyoga.co.uk