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# **COST OF LIVING CRISIS ROUNDTABLE REPORT**

Prepared by:  
The Larder and Unity Consulting

**THE  
LARDER**

Unit 6 B2 Brewster Square  
Brucefield Industrial Estate,  
Livingston,  
EH54 9BJ

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# BACKGROUND

The driving force in the establishment of The Larder was to create services that enabled those most disadvantaged make positive changes in their lives and in their communities; supporting them to reach their full potential. Twelve years on, this desire remains strong and is never more needed as the cost-of-living crisis looms.

Throughout this time, communities in West Lothian have experienced continued and growing poverty, many of those on the brink, if not already in destitution.

We have never known a time like this, where so many people are facing such a perilous existence.

With mounting energy bills and food prices on the rise, the choice of heating or eating is being faced by an alarming number of people in our communities.

Shocking as they are, reports of the Mothers surviving on leftovers, parents losing so much weight their jeans can no longer stay up, children in filthy clothes, parents so shamed they consider suicide or hot meals of the elderly being sacrificed to pay for their energy bills are becoming more and more common.

**It's quite clear that we are in the midst of a national food emergency.**

The Larder has never been an organisation to stand still and certainly not one to stand by. Whether that's been during the austerity that began in the 2010s or the recent COVID pandemic we've always sought to bring about support and fight for change, which is



**THE NATIONAL**  
THE NEWSPAPER THAT SUPPORTS AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND

“—  
| Figures show thousands  
of children are being  
treated for malnutrition |  
in Scotland —”

why we felt compelled to organise a Cost of Living Crisis Emergency Roundtable Discussion on Food Insecurity, in West Lothian.

The event was chaired by the renowned anti-poverty expert, Jim McCormick, and brought together over 45 key organisations, elected members, government officials and those with lived experience. We had representatives from organisations supporting children, disabilities, families, older people, young people, those with addictions, Trade Unions, low income, homeless, unemployed and domestic violence, all with a common message: We need to prevent people going hungry this winter.

This 'Snapshot Report' provides a brief overview of the key themes to emerge from the sessions and is designed to build quickly on the discussions at the event.

We believe we must act urgently to help turn words into action.

# SETTING THE SCENE

In welcoming all attendees, Angela Moohan, CEO of The Larder emphasised that it is for Governments to make systematic changes to eradicate and prevent poverty but that the people and organisations in the room were there because there is an immediate urgency to alleviate poverty. In the absence of any government eradicating poverty, responses that are led by people with lived experiences and the groups which support them, offer a glimmer of hope to those worst off in our society.

In opening the event Jim McCormick explained his view that poverty and in particular food poverty being experienced in the current 'Cost of Living Crisis' had become a social norm but that it was preventable and that the third sector had become a 4th emergency service.

Jim framed the current situation as:

Having lived through Austerity, Brexit, Covid-19, now Cost of Living Crisis, we're 'Stuck in the C's', when we needed fast-forward through the alphabet to Poverty Free, Prosperous and Secure.

IFAN has reported that 95% of organisations have had an increase or significant increase in the need for their services since the start of 2022 as a result of the Cost of Living Crisis.

**93%**

The West Lothian Food Network have noted a 13% increase in people accessing their services in comparison to 2021.

**13%**

**30%**

Over 30% of The Larder's Catalyst Kitchen beneficiaries joined the programme between April - September 2022.

West Lothian Foodbank have reported a 40% increase in referrals in comparison to 2021

**40%**

# LIVED EXPERIENCES

The meeting heard powerful contributions from three beneficiaries of the Larder's Catalyst Kitchen project - Tracey, Allan and Gemma.

## Tracey

Tracey explained that she survives on £280 every month and is having to make choices between costs such as heating and eating or which utility bill she can afford to pay. Tracey described the food support she receives from the larder as 'a miracle'.

## Gemma

Gemma gave a touching account of her experience of going from being 'comfortable' to being on Universal and 'still struggling'. Gemma explained that her mental health and autism made accessing food support challenging but that the support from The Larder had recognised and responded to those challenges.

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The event was also shown video testimonies from beneficiaries which can be viewed by clicking on the images below - please share these on your social media channels and within your networks.



## Alan

Alan's experience is now of having to forgo paying certain bills each month in order to make his income stretch. He described the paradox of having no money to 'go out' but not being able to afford to stay in the house either.

During lockdown, we weren't allowed to go outside.

Now that we can, I can't afford to go anywhere,

**but I can't afford to stay at home now either.**

I have four children and never have enough food to get myself through the week.

**I eat once a day to ensure my children eat.**

We're always running out of sanitary products and toiletries.

We just can't get out of the rut we have found ourselves in.

**It's pay bills and rent, OR buy food.**

# SESSION 1

## THE REALITY LOCALLY / INCOME (AND/OR SOCIAL) MAXIMISATION

A number of central themes emerged in the first roundtable session - primarily they focused on issues around:

- low pay drives people to destitution
- 'Cash-first' approaches are welcome BUT are only 'one part' of the response required
- communication and location of advice services
- the need for social maximisation as well as income maximisation.

On the issues of low pay, there were contributions which highlighted that poverty was being normalised to an extent 'not seen since the 1980s' and that the number of people who were in-work but in poverty was alarming. Organisations highlighted that there were a number of cases they worked on where the in-work poverty meant individuals were not eligible for certain support despite remaining in need.

Discussions around 'cash-first' responses welcomed any additional income for people, however, it was raised that a number of organisations were supporting people who had already been through various stages of income maximisation, financial health checks and welfare funds yet they still faced an extreme reality of food insecurity.

As part of the discussion on cash-first responses to poverty, there was consensus that the experiences of people having to tell and re-tell their 'story' time and again was degrading and exhausting.

The importance of co-locating advice and improving communication on advice services was stressed.

Many contributors raised the importance not just of being able to access food and financial support, but the fact that their experiences of poverty also cut them off from their community. In part, this was due to the shame felt by people who were struggling, but also the fact that income maximisation responses focused on the individual. Some attendees spoke of their case studies where people needed social maximisation too - in this they needed to be part of projects and groups that gave them a stake in their community again. It was suggested that as well as feeding people responses had to 'nourish the soul'.



**TFN** The voice of Scotland's vibrant voluntary sector

“ Malnutrition fears as older Scots choose heating over eating ”

# SESSION 2

## GAPS IN PROVISION

In Session 2, the roundtable focus was on what gaps were organisations aware of and what solutions were required and possible.

With over 45 key organisations, elected members, government officials and those with lived experience in attendance it's no surprise that the wealth of knowledge and experience in the room identified an extensive list of 'gaps' which needed to be closed.

These included issues of young children acting as carers for parents with mental health or addiction difficulties; older people facing digital exclusions from many services or benefits which require both IT hardware and know-how; the lack of preparation for people leaving prison; and the challenges experienced by people in temporary accommodation.

Contributions from education professionals informed the discussion on issues of children and young people coming to school in and around the roles they had assumed as carers for parents with mental health or addiction issues. Even where schools are trying to get help to vulnerable families there are challenges in getting that support through to people - the roundtable heard how the offers of food or entertainment had to be used as the way to 'bring people in'.

There was general consensus that education around food and cooking at a younger age as well as with families would be beneficial.

The challenges of Digitalisation raised were many, but particular focus was given to the costs attached to ensuring internet access - most commonly through smartphones - could still leave people struggling to access online services which were designed to be accessed by computers. Further to this, the digital exclusion of older people who had no real access or understanding of how to engage with many online advice or welfare services.

Temporary Accommodation contributions included concerns about the lack of cooking facilities available to residents, leaving them to survive on sandwiches and take-away food with only 'cooking by kettle' available in their accommodation. People living in hotel accommodation already face significant challenges with access to good and affordable food. The cost of buying take-away food comes at a premium which combined with the health disadvantages means this option is not financially sustainable or healthy. On this point the roundtable discussed the importance of a whole person approach to all services.



It was also raised that there were approx. 1200 homeless cases p/a in West Lothian with only approx 800 vacant houses and that some people experienced as much as 16 months in temporary accommodation which brought additional hidden costs such as keeping goods in storage.

Some organisations are starting to see pressure on volunteers who are struggling to continue their volunteering due to COLC, i.e. additional transport costs, having to deal with their own stress and anxiety and having to spend more time shopping themselves to keep their food budget under control. This has a knock on effect on some organisations' ability to continue the level of services, especially where there is a high level or reliance on volunteers.

The question is how do we get good food to people when they need it without the pressures of jumping through hoops - we need to trust poor people more.

The recent passing of a Scottish Youth Parliament Motion calling for the creation of a Youth Food Voucher Scheme was raised and received welcome support from the roundtable.

There was general consensus that funding structures for organisations were close to breaking point and not financially equipped to deal with additional demand. This includes council and Third Sector. It was also argued by some that the Scottish Welfare Fund, in particular, needs to be bigger.

The roundtable seemed in agreement that the situation is on a scale unprecedented in at least a generation. The scandal of people starving and freezing this winter was described by one attendee as needing a response to match that of the US Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

The irony of these 'perfect storm' conditions is that those organisations which are critical to supporting society's response to the cost of living crisis are the ones most adversely affected by the crisis.





# NEXT STEPS

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With over 45 key organisations, elected members, government officials and those with lived experience there was an agreement that the situation is on a scale unprecedented in at least a generation.

With this, the 45 individuals and organisations who gathered on the 3rd of October for the Cost of Living Crisis Emergency Roundtable committed and agreed to the following:



Calling upon the Scottish Government to enshrine the Right to Good Food in Scots Law.



Calling upon West Lothian Council to find appropriate solutions to those on homeless accommodation, without access to cooking facilities, to have at least one warm meal every day.



Ensuring all responses to the Cost of Living Crisis are based on Community Wealth Building Principles of Social Maximisation and Connecting Communities; ensuring people do not go hungry and are not isolated.

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# IN ADDITION

The Larder will be taking the following steps to call for urgent action by local and national Governments and to bring key food providers in West Lothian back around the table to discuss what immediate action can be taken and what we need to empower us to take that action.

- Carry out a survey following the event to identify how we get food to people during the winter
- Write to West Lothian Council Elected members asking them to agree a motion supporting the right to food to be enshrined in Scots Law
- write to Chief Executive officer of WLC to ask for a meeting to discuss this report and actions
- Invite key food providers and food poverty campaigners to come together to agree what can be achieved with current resource and identify what additional resource is needed
- Invite Scottish and UK parliamentary representatives to a meeting with key food providers and campaigners in WL
- Take up the offer from Foysol Choudhury MSP for a parliamentary Roundtable Discussion on the Right to Food
- Report back as each action is achieved

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**At The Larder, we encourage  
eating well, to be well;**

**Utilising food to nourish the  
mind, body and community**

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The West Lothian Cost of Living Crisis Emergency Roundtable brought together more than 45 frontline organisations, elected members, government officials and those with lived experience, in a short space of time, which speaks to the severity of the situation.

The Larder is keen that the Roundtable is not just a ‘talking shop’ but the starting point for turning words into action, so we have developed a survey to help identify the practical solutions that each organisation in attendance can take forward as part of our shared ambition to prevent people in West Lothian from starving this winter.

**A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS  
AWAITS US THIS WINTER.**

**THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW  
TO PREVENT PEOPLE  
STARVING.**

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The Larder will be holding a National Emergency Food Summit on the 18th of November.

Join us.  
Save lives.

**REGISTER**



# THE LARDER

Kirkton House  
1 Allen Rd  
Livingston  
West Lothian  
Scotland  
EH54 6TQ

communications@thelarder.org  
01506 412819

**[www.thelarder.org](http://www.thelarder.org)**

@LarderTraining



Scottish Charity Number SC042554  
Company Registration Number SC404466