

About You	
1.	<p>Your Name</p> <p>Catherine Duns</p>
2.	<p>Your Employer / Organisation</p> <p>Midlothian Council</p>
3.	<p>Your Position</p> <p>Senior Communities Lifelong Learning and Employability Worker</p>
4.	<p>Your E-Mail at Work</p> <p>catherine.duns@midlothian.gov.uk</p>
5.	<p>Your Role in the Project</p> <p>Catherine has had various roles within the project that have changed over time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her responsibilities include acting as a key contact for all parties involved, monitoring the project, evaluating how it is being administered, signposting within the project, and liaising with trusted partners.</p>
An Introduction to the Project	
6.	<p>Which partner organisations are involved in delivering the project (local authorities, organisations, community groups, etc.)?</p> <p>Midlothian Cost of Living Taskforce, Poverty Thematic Group</p> <p>Various Trusted Partners, including Mayfield and Easthouses Development Trust, Citizens Advice Dalkeith, Bonnyrigg Rose Football Club, British Red Cross, Home Link Family Support, Midlothian Sure Start, Women's Aid East and Midlothian, Citizens Advice Penicuik, Melville Housing Association, Food Facts Friends, Rosewell Development Trust, Newtongrange Development Trust, Midlothian Foodbank, withYOU, Lothian Veterans Centre</p>
7.	<p>Does the project have specific aims and/or objectives? If so, please add to the box below.</p> <p>The primary aim of the project is to increase income for those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis through as many means as possible, specifically focusing on food and fuel. Midlothian Council strive to increase the speed at which money can be allocated and reduce barriers to access. They hope to remove the stigma often attached to in-kind services, such as food banks, by providing cash payments for food and fuel instead.</p>
8.	<p>Does the project have a title? If so, please add to the box below.</p> <p>Midlothian Trusted Partner Model</p>
9.	<p>When did it start?</p> <p>December 2021</p>
10.	<p>Has it finished? Is it on-going? Does it have an end date? Please add dates to the box below.</p> <p>The project is on-going, with no known end date.</p>

11.	<p>Which groups of people, if any, are targeted by the service provided?</p> <p>Any Midlothian-based individual or family in need of financial support. The Trusted Partner Model targets both those in and outside deprived areas.</p>
12.	<p>How many people have been served by the project?</p> <p>2,355 instances of support have been delivered as of 29/08/2023.</p>
13.	<p>Where is it delivered?</p> <p>Midlothian</p>
The Initial Idea	
14.	<p>Who had the initial idea?</p> <p>Midlothian Council</p>
15.	<p>How did the idea for the project come about?</p> <p>The Trusted Partner Model was developed as a response to the cost-of-living crisis and COVID-19 pandemic, during which demand for cash payments for food and fuel increased dramatically.</p>
16.	<p>Did you draw on any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice you had seen elsewhere to inform your plans?</p> <p>Midlothian Council informed their initial plans using evidence of service demand. For example, 1,186 requests were made to the Communities & Lifelong Learning and Employability Service between 03/2020–06/2020. Aside from this, further initial evidence was lacking as the effects of the pandemic were new to everyone. More recent evidence has been required as the project is on-going. In March 2023, Midlothian’s Cost of Living Taskforce met to discuss findings from an endorsed, independent study on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on Midlothian households. Examples of initial findings include 17,000–21,000 Midlothian-based adults who cannot afford to keep their homes warm and 16,000 people who have experienced poverty-induced mental ill health. Findings such as these continue to inform the project.</p>
17.	<p>Who was involved in developing the initial idea of the project?</p> <p>Midlothian Council link workers were allocated to local resilience groups during the pandemic. They found evidence of demand for cash transfers and received feedback on how communities could best be supported. The resilience groups were allocated an initial £10,000. Trusted partner applications were then distributed. The Council and Cost of Living Taskforce developed this plan to address best the needs of locals affected by the cost-of-living crisis and pandemic.</p>
18.	<p>Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?</p> <p>Yes. Those with lived experience of poverty informed the development of the project. Demand for immediate financial aid skyrocketed during the pandemic and the project was established as a response to this. Evidence and testimonials from the resilience groups informed their plans going forward.</p>
19.	<p>What funding was used, if any, to support the development of the initial idea of the project?</p> <p>Midlothian’s Cost of Living Taskforce allocated Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery (LACER) funds to the Trusted Partner Model in its development.</p>

20.	What in-kind resources were needed when developing the initial idea of the project?	
	Facilities	N/A
	Equipment	N/A
	Local Knowledge	Local knowledge has been instrumental in targeting 'hard-to-reach' populations. For example: some men are less likely to seek help and are now further supported by predominantly male-focused groups such as the Lothian Veterans Centre. Rural areas are now covered by trusted partners such as Rosewell Development Trust. Local knowledge of public transport has also been helpful in decreasing food poverty. Food payment recipients reported stress relief after not having to take large food parcels on public transport, particularly when with children or during bad weather.
	Food and Drink	N/A
21.	What, if any, barriers did you have to overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain banks charge fees for withdrawing cash payments. • Safety concerns for staff delivering large sums of money. • High prices for food, particularly when ordering online. • Public transport health concerns due to COVID-19. • Inaccessibility of supermarkets, particularly for those in rural areas. • Issues with meter heating or prepaid meters as it is difficult to top-up someone else's credit card. 	
22.	What, if anything, was helpful when developing the initial idea of the project?	
	Local knowledge of barriers such as these was key when developing the Trusted Partner Model. It became evident that specific communities and demographics face unique barriers. Information gathered about group-specific obstacles informed the Council's plans going forward, whether removing obstacles entirely or recruiting trusted partners best equipped to address such difficulties.	
23.	Did you conduct a feasibility study?	
	No.	
24.	What was the timeline between the initial idea and the start of the project?	
	The initial idea came when existing disparities in wealth grew because of the COVID-19 lockdown. Applications for trusted partners to come on board occurred in December 2021 and further partners were identified to address specific gaps geographically and demographically. In applying, trusted partners had to demonstrate they could identify and deliver a cash-first approach to those in need. They also had to prove that a flexible, dignified approach is in place for locals to be aware of and have access to the potential support available through the given organisation. They then signed a service level agreement if the application was successful.	
25.	Who made the decision to introduce the project?	
	Midlothian Council	

Pilot Project		
26.	Did you run a pilot project?	
	Yes.	
27.	What did you do?	
	Midlothian's Winter Flexible Fund ran from 10/2021–02/2022 to reduce the financial impact of COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. It provided the foundation for the Trusted Partner Model going forward, with the primary difference between the two being size and scale. It was a trial to see if a cash-first approach was practical and feasible for the Council and its partners. Over 850 instances of financial aid were delivered to Midlothian residents who struggled to afford food and fuel. One of the initial partners, Midlothian Foodbank, supported 91 families with a food voucher service.	
28.	Who was involved in the work of the pilot project?	
	Midlothian Council, 10 initial trusted partners	
29.	How, if at all, were those with lived experience of poverty involved in the pilot of the project?	
	Those with lived experience provided anecdotal feedback which helped formalise the Trusted Partner Model. Many partners have volunteers with lived experience.	
30.	What funding was used, if any, for the pilot project?	
	The Scottish Government provided funding.	
31.	What in-kind resources were used for the pilot project?	
	Facilities	N/A
	Equipment	N/A
	Local Knowledge	N/A
	Food and Drink	N/A
32.	Was the pilot project evaluated?	
	Yes. The Council and the initial partners evaluated the project with anecdotal evidence and lived experience testimonies. They also completed risk assessments, provided guidance, and conducted monitoring. It was included in two annual reports: Profile of Midlothian 2022 and Local Child Poverty Action Report Year 4 (21/22).	
33.	What evidence, if any, from the pilot project was used to confirm that it was working?	
	Evidence that it was working comprised of testimonials from service users and demand for the service.	
34.	Who made the decision to continue with the project beyond the pilot project?	
	Midlothian Council	
35.	How did the pilot project inform the final design of the project?	
	The Winter Flexible Fund highlighted that further funding was needed, and more partners were required to cover underrepresented areas. This then informed the final design. Midlothian Foodbank's food voucher service also informed the Trusted Partner Model's referral process, as it became apparent that publicly advertising the	

	Model would lead to overwhelming, unsustainable demand. Midlothian Foodbank's service also highlighted the need for a direct cash-based approach, as many physical barriers arose with the food vouchers service (i.e. inaccessibility of participating supermarkets and cost of public transport).	
The On-going Development of the Project		
36.	Has the project changed through time?	
	Yes.	
37.	In what ways has it changed?	
	Scale	The number of trusted partners has increased over the course of the project.
	Location	There is increased coverage, for example: Bonnyrigg Rose Football Club and Rosewell Development Trust are now targeting previously underrepresented areas.
	Population	Underrepresented age groups (i.e. elderly people) are now covered by trusted partners such as the British Red Cross.
	The Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refinement of guidelines and feedback process. • Strengthened communication between partners has increased referrals between organisations. • Increased knowledge exchange and feedback between the Council and partners. • Payment of an additional sum of 15% to cover partners' on-costs in relation to staffing.
38.	What were the reason for these changes?	
	These changes occurred after gaps in coverage were identified. Midlothian Council responded by increasing the number of trusted partners involved. As the project became finalised, the Council refined its guidelines for partners, facilitated communication and transparency both between partners and the Council, and included on-cost payments to 15%. This included access to training and shared learning. All of this was done to ensure the success and efficacy of the Model.	
Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users		
39.	Is there a referral process? If yes, how does the referral process work (self-referral, referred by other agencies, identified from an existing database)	
	Yes. Information about the Trusted Partner Model circulates amongst professionals and those who work in the area, including child and family social workers, contact centre employees, and educational and health professionals. Service users involved with these services are then referred to the Model if they require money for food and/or fuel.	
40.	How are potential clients made aware of the project?	
	Service users are made aware through professionals in the field to handle demand for food and fuel payments. Information about referrals for the Model spread primarily through word-of-mouth. The project was not advertised to the public.	
41.	How do you keep in touch with service users? Do your service users have a preferred method of contact?	

	The preferred method of communication varies depending on the trusted partner. However, it usually entails informal, word-of-mouth signposting to provide holistic support. Generally, service users are already linked with other services, and the most common method of contact within these services is word-of-mouth. Midlothian Council does not actively contact former service users.
Working With People with Lived Experience of Poverty	
42.	Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?
	Most trusted partners have volunteers with lived experience who help deliver their services, but what this entails varies depending on the organisation.
43.	Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project, <u>supervision</u> within the project, or <u>project governance</u>?
	Some trusted partners have those with lived experience involved in this capacity. For instance, Midlothian Sure Start has parents with lived experience on their board to help manage, supervise, and govern their initiative.
44.	Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>any other aspect</u> of the project?
	Yes. People with lived experience of poverty are involved in feedback groups to help with the project's internal and external evaluation. Several parents with lived experience were interviewed during an external evaluation organised by the Cost of Living Taskforce. Those with lived experience provide regular feedback.
Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working`	
45.	Who has overall responsibility for the project?
	Midlothian Council, Midlothian Cost of Living Taskforce, Poverty Thematic Group
46.	Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?
	No. Midlothian Council has various other responsibilities regarding the welfare of Midlothian residents. The Trusted Partner Model is just one aspect of the Cost of Living Taskforce's work to tackle poverty in Midlothian. The Taskforce distributes LACER funds to other related projects, makes recommendations to the Council, and mitigates the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in Midlothian.
47.	Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group or Organising Committee?
	Yes. The Trusted Partner Model has an advisory group comprising of service users. They meet every few months to discuss trends, make comments and suggestions, or raise queries. Service users also complete monitoring forms regularly for the Council to review. This describes their use of the Model and their demographic and priority group(s). Service users sometimes provide feedback to the Council outside of group feedback meetings. Each of the trusted partners also has their own methods of monitoring.
Staffing	
48.	Are there any paid staff?
	Yes. Midlothian Council predominantly have paid staff for managing, delivering, and reviewing projects like the Trusted Partner Model. Some of the trusted partners are professional organisations that primarily have paid staff, whereas community-based projects tend to have a variety of paid staff and volunteers.

49.	Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?	
	Yes. Most of the trusted partners have local volunteers. Their roles may involve signposting within the organisation, referring people to pantries or foodbanks, or fulfilling unique responsibilities for the organisation.	
Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements		
50.	Is the project part of a wider anti-poverty strategy?	
	Yes. The Trusted Partner Model is part of Midlothian's broader anti-poverty strategy. It is included in the Cost of Living Taskforce's budget to mitigate the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. It is also a key element of the Single Midlothian Plan 2023–27, which was developed to outline their plan to eradicate poverty in Midlothian by 2027.	
51.	Is the project part of any other strategy?	
	No.	
52.	Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment.	
	No.	
Funding		
53.	Who funds the project?	
	Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery (LACER)	
54.	How is the project funded?	
	The Midlothian Cost of Living Taskforce allocates LACER funds to trusted partners. The funds the trusted partners receive is then used to support clear economic recovery and/or low-income household support. This cash-first approach for food and fuel is delivered to help low-income households disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis become increasingly economically active.	
55.	What is the budget for the project / how much does it cost to deliver?	
	The current budget is £569,000. However, some trusted partners have received external funding and have yet to fully utilise their allocated funds.	
56.	Is future funding based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered?	
	Yes. Midlothian Council plan to apply for funding from the Scottish Government to strengthen the project for Winter 2023. This application will be supported by the Nick Hopkins Consulting external review and confirmation that outcomes are being delivered.	
Resources		
57.	What in-kind resources do you need to deliver your project?	
	Facilities	Some trusted partners provide in-kind resources such as facilities, equipment, and food and drink for service users. However, this is not explicitly part of the Trusted Partner Model's aims.
	Equipment	See 'Facilities'.
	Local Knowledge	Local knowledge has been vital in informing the project's cash-first approach, particularly for underrepresented groups (i.e.,

		those not registered in schools or social services and single-person households). Local knowledge has informed how approaches can be modified to serve these groups.
	Food and Drink	See 'Facilities'.
58.	For each of the in-kind resources listed above, who provides it?	
	Facilities	Some trusted partners provide this within their respective organisations.
	Equipment	See 'Facilities'.
	Local Knowledge	Service users provide local knowledge in feedback groups or individually, as do trusted partners who have informed Midlothian Council how to best target certain populations.
	Food and Drink	See 'Facilities'.
59.	Did you have to buy or develop new IT systems, software (databases, apps) or technology to deliver your project?	
	No. New technology has not been a barrier.	
60.	Was additional staff training required to deliver your project?	
	Yes, additional training was given to trusted partners by Midlothian Council employees. All new training was done with the 'dignity model' at the forefront. It involved how to signpost, manage expectations, and orchestrate potential scenarios for staff. Additional training was given to some organisations to address knowledge discrepancies on how best to deliver a cash-first approach.	
Formal Monitoring and Evaluation		
61.	What information, if any, do you collect about your project?	
	Number of users	No. Midlothian Council keeps track of how many support instances have been delivered rather than the number of users because individual monitoring is anonymised.
	Profile of users	Yes. Demographics and priority groups are recorded for monitoring purposes; however, this is also anonymised.
	Experience of users	The experience of service users is collected regularly through monitoring forms. They also come together for advisory group meetings every few months to discuss their experience, make suggestions, or comment on trends. Experiences were also reviewed during the external evaluation conducted by Nick Hopkins Consulting.
	Anything else	N/A
62.	How often is data collected? Who collects the data?	
	Monitoring is completed monthly by Midlothian Council and an external evaluation occurred at the start of 2023. This helped inform the Single Midlothian Plan 2023–27 and their poverty prevention work. The evaluation was then sent off for the Cost of Living Taskforce to review and provide funding based on the report. It will also be sent to the Scottish Government as part of their application for additional funding.	
63.	Do you have baseline data on what things were like before the start of the project or before users started the project?	

	Yes. There is baseline data about what things were like in Midlothian before the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. This was also outlined in the Cost of Living Taskforce's independent study (i.e., nearly a quarter of Midlothian-based children lived in poverty before the pandemic). However, because the project was developed in response to these crises, there was little to no baseline data on handling this tumultuous period.
64.	Do you produce an annual report?
	Yes, although most reporting is on-going rather than solely annual. Reports and monitoring forms include demographic and priority group information, local area, experiences and feedback, how many payments have been received, and whether it's for food or fuel. The personal identity of service users is protected throughout this.
65.	In what ways, if at all, do you use the data that you collect to adapt the service that you provide?
	The data is used to adapt the service in several ways, such as tackling unexpected barriers or figuring out how best to aid specific populations or priority groups. This is done on a rolling basis. For example, during winter, households with small children and/or babies might need additional money for heating.
66.	Have you employed an external organisation to formally evaluate your project?
	Yes, an external evaluation was conducted by Nick Hopkins Consulting. This was endorsed by the Cost of Living Taskforce with LACER funds. Nick Hopkins evaluated if the project is reaching the people in need, whether the delivery processes are effective, the project's impact and strengths, and whether these findings justify its continued existence. An element of his research involved interviewing over 20 service users, all of whom were parents from varying types of households.
67.	If yes, in what ways, if at all, have you used the External Project evaluation to adapt the service that you provide.
	Following evaluation, Midlothian Council plan to set up a panel for the project as lived experience feedback is crucial to its success. The Council will adapt what they can control as they look forward to future funding, specifically regarding the feasibility of long-term delivery, continually evolving with their trusted partners to support isolated households and addressing new challenges. There are also plans to organise an outreach services bus for trusted partners. This will involve promotion and ensuring those in need know what is available. They also hope to set up weekend meetings to support families and those working full-time.
68.	Do you intend to employ an external organisation to evaluate the service that you provide in the future?
	No.
Impact	
69.	What difference has the project made?
	The Trusted Partner Model has alleviated anxiety, stress, and other mental health problems related to or exacerbated by poverty. Midlothian residents report now being able to focus on other things that will further increase their general and financial livelihood. It has reduced the impact of the cost-of-living crisis for people in need, whether those facing an acute crisis or those coping with long-term challenges. Because of the variety of trusted partners on board and the coordination of Midlothian Council, the Model has both breadth and depth in that it is large in scale yet informed

	by community-based approaches. Due to this, the Model has effectively alleviated food and fuel poverty for various populations in Midlothian.
70.	How do you know this? What evidence demonstrates impact (metrics, interviews, feedback)?
	Feedback groups and interviews conducted by Midlothian Council and Nick Hopkins Consulting have demonstrated the project's impact. Regular monitoring is also completed by trusted partners and sent to the Council to evaluate efficacy and trends.
71.	To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?
	The Trusted Partner Model has achieved its aim of reducing the cost of living in Midlothian. A positive consequence of this achievement is that the model has increased service users' wellbeing and mental health.
72.	How, if at all, has the demand for the service provided by Midlothian Trusted Partner Model changed since it started?
	Demand for the service changes seasonally. One identifiable trend is that there is less demand over the summer period. Service users may come and go as their circumstances change. For instance, if they find a job or receive Universal Credit. On the other hand, the Trusted Partner Model adapts to serve individuals who have been made homeless or if someone is fleeing domestic violence.
73.	If yes, has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?
	Yes, due to the high budget and number of trusted partners coordinating with Midlothian Council. The Council are aware that demand will increase in the winter months, and they have plans to apply for funding from the Scottish Government. Trusted partners are also communicative if they can no longer cope with demand and need to pause their work as a trusted partner. The addition of 15% on-cost claims for the partners is also helping to meet their needs.
74.	Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?
	A positive outcome is that coverage of vulnerable populations has increased over time as the number of trusted partners on board has grown. Trusted partners with local knowledge or a specific focus have been key for education. This new knowledge and awareness are utilised to best serve highlighted communities.
75.	In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?
	Yes. The Trusted Partner Model tackles poverty through cash payments for food, fuel, and other essentials (i.e., bedding or a carpet for warmth). It continually evolves to meet demand, whether increasing the number of partners on board, applying for further funding, or gaining local knowledge about isolated groups. Midlothian Council are aware that needs vary depending on the household and adapt to meet new demands.
Learning from Experience	
76.	What is working well?
	All controllable aspects of the Trusted Partner Model are going well. As stated previously, it is evolving, staying up to date with trends, and reaching as many underrepresented populations as possible.
77.	What, if anything, is working less well?

	As a large, council-wide project, concerns about what cannot be controlled are inevitable. Although trusted partners and Midlothian Council are doing their best to minimise this, there are concerns about the unknown—such as concerns that service users may seek support from several partners. However, this awareness and willingness to be proactive shows that progress will continue to be made to increase coverage of isolated populations across the area.	
78.	What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners? For example, is there anything that you would do differently?	
	It is advisable to have clear parameters and monitoring from the very start of the project. It is difficult to backtrack once services have already been delivered. It is also important to adopt a collaborative approach when sharing best practice and knowledge acquired from interventions, such as food and fuel payments for low-income households. This helps maximise benefits and positive impact whilst minimising risk and unintended consequences.	
79.	What plans do you have to develop or expand the project in the future?	
	Midlothian Council have plans to apply for funding from the Scottish Government. The Council also plan to continue supporting their trusted partners, including acquiring external funds so they can continue with other goals.	
80.	How easily do you think your project could be replicated in another setting?	
	It could easily be replicated with adequate funding in place. The application used for trusted partners to come on board, the guidance in place, and service level agreements can be shared with anybody.	
Social Media		
81.	Please enter social media contact details and weblinks to supporting documents or resources below:	
	Web Pages	N/A
	Facebook	N/A
	Instagram	N/A
	Twitter	N/A
	Tik-Tok	N/A
GDPR Consent		
I give my permission to be named in the tackling poverty locally directory and associated public outputs.		Yes.
I give permission for our organisation to be named in the tackling poverty locally directory and associated public outputs.		Yes.
I give permission for me to be contacted by directory users.		Yes.
I am willing to be contacted if more details are required		Yes.