

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Part 4 - How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

This document comprises the following sections (click hyperlink to skip to that section)

- [Initial Idea](#)
- [Early Development of the Project](#)
- [Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users](#)
- [Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty](#)
- [Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working](#)
- [Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements](#)
- [Funding](#)
- [Staffing and Resources](#)
- [Monitoring and Evaluation](#)
- [Reach and Impact](#)
- [Learning from Experience](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Title	Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)
Organisation	Fife Council
Category	Fully Validated and Adopted Elsewhere
Poverty Impact	Prevention, Reduction, Mitigation, Awareness
Introduction to the Project	
<p>Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) is a data platform that combines several different datasets to provide a holistic view of low-income families in Fife. It brings together data on council tax reduction, housing benefits and legacy benefits. It is being utilised to tackle problem debt and arrears, maximise the income of households, evidence return on investment in support, identify and support families at risk of eviction, avoid unnecessary cost by preventing hardship and understand demand for services. LIFT combines multiple datasets to increase understanding of low-income families, enabling the Council to better support families and track the success of interventions. It has since been implemented in Aberdeen.</p>	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?			
A collective.			
How did the idea for the project come about?			
<p>The idea for the project came about after the COVID-19 pandemic caused increased financial vulnerability. This required safeguarding and identifying households which would benefit from extra support. The Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV), an organisation in the field of benefits, also supported the initial idea. There was a lot of awareness around the use of benefits from those who administer benefits, and that this data should try and help give support to reduce poverty and allow identification of households requiring help. The Head of Revenue and Benefits for Fife endorsed LIFT which has been used across England. LIFT was then adapted for Scotland.</p>			
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?			
<p>Fife's Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2007–2017 was drawn upon. The 2021 recovery and renewal priority from the pandemic also focused on tackling poverty. Reporting on the level of benefit take-up also informed the initial idea as there was scope to do something in this space. LIFT would be the tool to do this. The Fife Benefit Checker was also utilised.</p>			
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?			
National networks around IRRV and Fife's Tackling Poverty Board.			
Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?			
No.			
Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?			
No		Yes	✓

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Please provide details of the funding that was used to support the development of the initial idea of the project.

Which organisation provided funding?	Likely through recovery funding—using money coming in to Fife Council.
How much was required?	£40,000 a year.
What was the specific source of funding? (e.g., particular grant or policy)	Initial funding through community/recovery funding.
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?	
No	Yes ✓

Please provide details of the resources that were required when developing the initial idea of the project.

Staff/Volunteer Time	Research team, safe researcher training and data training as this system is not accessible to the public due to data sensitivity. There was a need to train the team to increase knowledge of the benefit system which took time, and a lot of time/resources were needed for the technical side.
Facilities / Workspace	Technical and IT project set-up, particularly where systems like council tax needed integrated into the system and getting certain reports running in an eligible system. It cost £500–£1,000 to get a new report built into the system in terms of the system supplier's time.
Equipment	Council Tax and Housing Benefit systems extracts.
Local Knowledge	N/A
Food and Drink	N/A

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

What, if any, barriers had to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?

The technical side of getting the data in the right format to incorporate into the system was a barrier. Most of the LIFT dashboards set up for England and Wales and Scottish benefits are slightly different. LIFT needed tailored for a Scottish context. Aberdeen have recently started using it and are benefiting from the knowledge Fife Council gained during this developmental stage. The Scottish Welfare Fund is not fully integrated into Fife's LIFT system.
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What, if anything, helped enable development of the initial idea of the project?

England and Wales LIFT systems.

How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?

Around 2020, Fife Council became aware of LIFT. There was a recognised need for it after the pandemic as LIFT is costly to local authorities who need to budget their funds.
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Who made the decision to introduce the project?
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Fife Council.

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Early Development – Pilot Project or Feasibility Study

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a pilot project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a feasibility study	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Is there a referral process?	
No	✓
Yes	
Other than referral, how do potential clients come to know about the project?	
<p>Users are identified based on characteristics. They do not reach out themselves. LIFT is data-led and gathers information on which households meet certain criteria and might benefit from support.</p> <p>Those who are in some kind of debt to the Council, approximately 552 households, can be profiled into nine groups. Whether they have good, fair or poor affordability and low, medium or high vulnerability. The combination of those different attributes is the default collection process used, which means that those who need additional support can have their debt possibly written off. Currently, there's about 300 households that meet the criteria considered for debt write off.</p>	
What is the most common way through which users typically access the service?	
N/A	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to service users?	
No	
Yes	✓
Letters are sent to those identified as needing extra support and eligible for unclaimed benefits.	

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?	
No	✓
Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or project governance?	
No	✓
Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project?	
No	✓
Yes	

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?	
Research Manager.	
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?	
Yes	
No	✓
Management of a team that provides the Council's research function, supports an evidence-based approach to decision-making and focuses on prevention through prioritised projects that provide insight on priority, place and demographic to inform local and strategic planning.	
What proportion of the manager's overall workload is given over to this project?	
Most of it	
About half of it	
Just a small proportion of it	✓
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?	
No	
Yes	✓
The LIFT team meets weekly. They meet monthly with Policy in Practice where any issues or raised or new reports are discussed. Coryn, is Chair for a Tackle Poverty and Evidence Group which is a subgroup of the Tackle Poverty board. People are kept aware of how LIFT is used which enables external scrutiny. They work closely with the Income Maximisation, Debt and Affordable Credit Group in terms of how LIFT data can support benefit take-up campaigns and identify areas where LIFT could help.	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?	
No	
Yes	✓
There is a Welfare Planning Group with Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland. There is also a Tackling Poverty and Preventing Crisis Board.	

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

In your opinion, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
LIFT is part of Fife Council's anti-poverty strategy. It is used to monitor changes and identify opportunities for income maximisation of households.	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
LIFT is a key strand of the Council's anti-poverty strategy—specifically, getting more resources to poverty prevention through programmes around the cost of living and Winter Fuel Payments and keeping an eye on applications to Scottish Welfare Fund (especially repeat applicants). From this, LIFT has been used to support repeat applicants and understand the characteristics of these households.	
Is the project part of any other strategy?	
Don't know	
No	✓
Yes	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	
No	✓
Yes	

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Funding

Has external funding been secured to support the work?		
No	✓	
Yes		
Has a specific sum been secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
No		
Yes	✓	
Please provide details of the funding that was used secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
How much funding was secured?	£40,000 a year.	
For how long has funding been secured?	From 2022–2026.	
Is future funding from the host organisation a possibility?		
Don't know		
No		
Yes	✓	
Is future funding from the host organisation based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered?		
No	✓	
Yes		

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from the host organisation contribute toward the work of this project as part of their broader work for the organisation?			
		No	
		Yes	✓
The LIFT team is part of the wider research team. The technical team and data protection team provide support when required.			
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?			
		No	✓
		Yes	
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?			
		No	✓
		Yes	
Policy in Practice have employed additional paid staff and maintaining the database is done at their end, but files are sent from Fife Council's IT people on a monthly basis.			
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?			
		No	✓
		Yes	
The Benefits Maximisation Coordinator, Audrey Whyte, is employed by Fife Council but works for CARF. She identifies areas for improvement but does not have access to the dashboard due to data protection.			
Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?			
No		✓	
		Yes	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?

No	
Yes	✓

Additional reports were needed to get the data in the correct format.

Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?

No	
Yes	✓

Data Sensitivity training for the team was required.

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Monitoring and Evaluation

Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?	
No	
Yes	✓
Fife Council had baseline data on poverty in the area prior to LIFT, but the database provides a new level of detail. Change is demonstrated through the LIFT system, showing which households became more financially resilient or left the LIFT system altogether.	
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?	
Yes	✓
No	
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project?	
Policy in Practice and Fife Council monitor the impact of the project. The Third Pension Credit campaign being carried is being processed by DWP, but LIFT has enabled this. Policy in Practice runs reports informing how many of the 400 people that received letters in September 2024 have gone on to claim Pension Credit and what that means in terms of backdated Pension Credit. Policy in Practice were able to further analyse this to find if these households are now able to qualify for a free TV licence or meet the criteria for Attendance Allowance. The three campaigns from Pension Credit alone showed that £1.2 million per year has been brought into Fife households.	
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation?	
On an annual basis. There tends to be regular reporting to the cabinet committee on tackling poverty and cost of living issues where LIFT successes are included. LIFT is included in Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPAR) which is developed on an annual basis. The LCPAR highlights the number of people supported to mitigate the benefit cap and how much money was brought to these households.	
What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to impact of the project?	
Outreach efforts and campaigns.	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?				
Number of users	Yes	✓	No	
Profile of users	Yes	✓	No	
Experience of users	Yes		No	✓
Outcomes for users	Yes	✓	No	
Anything else	Yes		No	
<p>Profiling is used to help support households and improve the service. 109 households were contacted about Pension Credit but are not engaging. 89 of those are council tenants and 20 are from the Cowdenbeath area. This allows a strategy to plan the approach the organisation could take to helping these people through local networks, tailoring the letter, allowing someone to talk through the letter and explain it's not a scam and making sure people open the letters. LIFT are also looking to build into benefit checker due to the social value impact of the benefit checker training.</p>				
Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?				
			No	
			Yes	✓
<p>Data collection is used to adapt plans on how to reach out to users who have not reached out. It is also used to establish a precedent for what the team could do in the future and trying to push the boundaries of it each time as well. With the Pension Credit making the case with data protection that if most of those not responding to the letters are council tenants then could they get their housing management officer to reach out and offer a benefit check.</p>				
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?				
			No	✓
			Yes	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?	
Don't know / no current plans	
No	✓
Yes	
Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?	
Don't know / no current plans	
No	
Yes	✓

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)



Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	
Fully met	
Making progress toward meeting Aims	✓
Not making progress	
The aim to improve the use of data has been fully met. LIFT is definitely making progress toward meeting its other aims.	
What difference has the project made?	
Some households have left the LIFT system and others have claimed benefits they were informed about. Debt arrears are assessed and potentially written off to mitigate poverty. Details that Fife Council have acquired through LIFT is being converted into action and outreach. It also works to prevent poverty (i.e., homelessness) by allowing people to maintain their tenancies. It also makes low-income households more financially resilient and not in a crisis.	
Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	
No	✓
Yes	

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Has the project changed through time?	
	No
	Yes ✓
What changed	Adding more benefits and knowledge on what LIFT can be used for. LIFT is also in the process of incorporating data on council tax arrears which will give a fuller picture of people who are in debt and opportunities for income maximisation. This data would allow the Council to know if these individuals would be more financially resilient if they received benefits. It might also prevent them from getting into arrears. LIFT is also starting to bring in data on Universal Credit which gives a more integrated view than the council tax system, council tax or council rent arrears can on their own.
Why has it changed	It has changed to increase confidence in identifying households who would benefit from this and for targeted outreach in particular areas. Funding for free childcare but this has not had great take-up.
Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?	
	No
	Yes ✓
Finding out who will take responsibility for identifying challenges budgetary responsibilities is an unexpected outcome. Also, whose budget outreach letters emerge for campaigns.	
In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?	
	No
	Yes ✓
Households can claim benefits they did not know they were eligible for and LIFT improves income maximisation.	

[Return to Introduction](#)

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Learning from Experience

What is working well?	
LIFT's holistic approach is working well as it shows what is going on for a particular household and this is used to provide support. Identifying where to disperse resources, what areas need targeted and what support might be required is also working well.	
What, if anything, is working less well?	
N/A	
What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?	
Other projects might benefit from bringing information together from a range sources. Holistic frameworks to provide support are also beneficial to low-income households.	
Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	
No	✓
Yes	
How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?	
It wasn't easy to get up and running and there are still problems, for instance gathering Scottish Welfare data is taking a long time. However, Aberdeen have been using LIFT which shows that it is replicable. Glasgow and Edinburgh councils have been exploring using it. Falkirk adopted LIFT before Fife but have since invested in their own data systems and infrastructure. They are confident they have the information they need without going through Policy in Practice.	

[Return to Introduction](#)