

Surge in number of West Lothian council employees earning more than £50,000 a year

The number of West Lothian council employees earning more than £50,000 a year surged in the last year.

The figure jumped from 183 in 2022 to 2023 to 856 in the last financial year, 2023 to 2024.

The council's chief accountant told a meeting of councillors the jump was largely down to long serving staff earning incrementally and nationally agreed pay increases for teachers and non teaching staff in the last two financial years.

A combination of backdated pay awards and new pay deals have pushed teachers' salaries up 14 per cent since April last year.

The remuneration threshold was last set in 2014. This was cited as another reason for the surge in numbers moving into the £50,000 to £55,000 bracket. The council is one of the biggest employers in the county – with more than 8,000 staff.

The average salary in West Lothian is just over £33,000 – higher than many areas in central Scotland.

The figures were contained in a report of the unaudited Annual Accounts for the council which went before members of the Audit Committee in the last meeting before the summer

recess.

SNP Councillor for Linlithgow, Pauline Orr asked interim director of finance Patrick Welsh: "There's been a huge jump in the number of employees who are in the £50,000 to £55,000 – 856 from 183 last year. Can you give a wee bit of distillation around that.

"Is it staff being promoted, which is obviously fantastic to see? Or is it that we are having to reassess [our pay structure] to recruit staff?"

Mr Welsh said: "In terms of the increase in staff earning over £50,000 that's largely down to just the impact of pay awards. Also incremental salary increases and the nationally agreed pay for non-teaching staff has pushed salaries up."

In his report Mr Welsh said: "The number of officers whose remuneration was £50,000 or more during 2023 to 2024 increased from 2022 to 2023 for a number of reasons: – Following finalisation of the 2022 to 2023 teachers pay award negotiations in March 2023 teachers were paid the backdated full year effect of the 7 per cent pay award in April 2023.

"From 1 April 2023, teachers were paid a further five per cent nationally agreed pay award. From 1 January 2024 teachers were paid a further 2 per cent nationally agreed pay award.

"Other reasons include incremental salary progression for all staff.

"A combination of the 2023 to 2024 salary paid and the 2022 to 2023 back pay paid during 2023 to 2024 has effectively increased the remuneration of some teachers into the greater than £50,000 bracket for the first time."

He added: "That £50,000 threshold has been in place since 2014 so obviously over a 10 year period there's more and more people moved into the threshold , especially in the last

few years as pay awards have been higher than in previous years.”

A West Lothian Council spokesperson said: “A combination of the 2023 to 2024 salary paid and the 2022 to 2023 back pay paid during 2023 to 2024 has effectively increased the remuneration of some teachers into the greater than £50,000 bracket for the first time. The council has no control over pay award negotiations and these are agreed nationally for all teachers. Nearly 80 per cent of council staff earning over £50,000 per year are teaching staff.

The number of staff whose remuneration was £50,000 or more during 2023 to 2024 increased by 908 from 2022 to 2023 for a number of reasons: –

Following finalisation of the 2022 to 2023 Teachers pay award negotiations in March 2023 teachers were paid the backdated full year effect of the 7 per cent pay award in April 2023.

From 1 April 2023 teachers were paid a further 5 per cent nationally agreed pay award.

From 1 January 2024 teachers were paid a further 2 per cent nationally agreed pay award.

Incremental salary progression for all staff.

Nationally agreed pay award for all other staff groups during 2023 to 2024”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter