

Unemployment in West Lothian stubborn but stable at around 3,000

The percentage of unemployed people in West Lothian is almost half the UK average for the second year running.

The figure, just over 3,000, remains similar to last year – at a time when wages across the county have seen a surge, councillors heard this week.

Business support staff also revealed that inflation which had fallen below 2% this year will climb back to 2.5% by Christmas.

Craig McCorriston, the head of economic development also told the Economy, Community Empowerment and Wealth Building Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) that the council's business promotion website was being improved after its launch last year.

A report to the PDSP said: "Claimant count for West Lothian is 3,325, at 2.5% for July 2024, which is slightly lower than the Scottish rate (2.9%), yet materially lower than the UK rate (4.2%)."

"The rate for July is now below the level seen around January 2020. Compared to the national picture, West Lothian's claimant rate has remained stable, just slightly lower than this time last year (2.7% July 2023)."

West Lothian uses the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Claimant count which is a slightly more reliable measure of unemployment than the Office for National Statistics' general estimate of unemployment rate which is based on a large sample of individuals surveyed every month in the UK Labour Force Survey.

It added: "Inflation is expected to rise to around 2.5% by the end of 2024. This is mainly due to increasing energy prices, with additional risks from geopolitical factors."

Local firms report that wage growth, driven by continued competition for skills and wider cost-of-living pressures, has remained strong.

The report compiled by the Business Development Unit also highlighted the surge in wages in the spring.

"Wages are up 6.4% for the first quarter of this year. However, there are tentative signs that the UK jobs market is cooling. Jobs on offer in the UK dropped 26,000 to 898,000 vacancies between February and April."

The council hosted a jobs fair in May which was supported by 25 local firms. Mr McCorristion said: "There was a good range of new job opportunities for those seeking employment, or local people looking to improve on their current job."

The Invest in West Lothian website has been expanded since its launch last year and had over 6,000 visitors in the first three months of the year.

Councillor Peter Heggie asked: "What kind of follow up do we get from those who visit the site. Do we ask those who visit the site if there's anything missing. I suppose it's just to make sure that we are making the most of the contact. What kind of timescales do we have to get back to people?"

Linzi Winton, the Business Gateway Team Leader: said: "We

don't capture feedback directly but that is something we are going to improve on. We follow up through inquiry forms and through customer feedback. If you complete an inquiry form, it would be checked by our team, and we'd be back the same day or next working day."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter