

Union anger over West Lothian Council facebook post

Unions representing West Lothian council staff have accused senior officials of “perpetuating myths” around pay amid the growing financial crisis facing local government.

They have written to the council’s Chief Executive in protest at posts which appeared on the council’s social media suggesting pay deals stoke financial problems.

The Joint Trade Unions told the Local Democracy Reporting Service ‘paying a decent working wage is not the cause of the crisis.’

Jane Ridgway, chair of the Joint Trade Unions, said: “West Lothian trade unions have responded angrily to learning about the council’s financial crisis and proposals to cut more jobs and services via a council Facebook post.

She added: “In a letter to the Council’s Chief Executive, Unison, GMB and Unite expressed anger that the council’s Facebook post continues to perpetuate the myth that paying public sector workers a decent wage is in part responsible for the financial crisis.

Ms Ridgway told the LDRS: “The refusal of government to properly fund services isn’t the fault of the people who deliver them. It is the fault of the Scottish government who have starved local government of funds, refused to raise money

themselves and prevented councils from raising their own revenue.

“The value of local government pay has fallen by 25% over the last 14 years and low pay in local government still proliferates.”

The unions responded to a post on social media last week which highlighted the growing financial crisis the council is facing.

The council said: “The update from the council’s Head of Finance and Property Services is part of the budget monitoring process and confirms that the continuing financial crisis facing councils is of a magnitude never experienced before.”

The council statement which ignited union anger read: “All services areas will be affected and, although the council has a no compulsory redundancy position, the scale of the budget pressures facing the council will impact on staff numbers. Overall, the number of council staff will reduce over the next two years.”

This latest update confirmed that the council has a substantial overspend this year (2024/25) of over £5.5 million which means that more savings are now required to allow the council to balance its budget.

Chief Executive Graham Hope said on the post: “The only option we have is to reduce some services and transform the way in which some services are provided.”

And the head of Finance Patrick Welsh added: “Some of the most significant risks and uncertainties include the impact of inflation, annual constrained grant funding from the Scottish Government, pay award costs, policy changes by the government without adequate funding, and growing demographic demands.”

Warnings from Westminster and Holyrood are already painting a

grim financial scenario for West Lothian and other local authorities next year.

In Livingston councillors have been forced to agree to more than £100m of cuts in the last 15 years as services have been whittled to the bone and ring-fenced spending imposed by Holyrood has grown.

The Westminster budget at the end of October will be followed by the Holyrood budget in mid-December but it will be the end of January before finance officers have finalised exactly how little room for manoeuvre West Lothian will have in the new financial year.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter