

SNP wins demand to call for vote on Waspi pension scandal

West Lothian Council is to write to the Labour government demanding a rethink on its decision not to compensate some 10,000 local women in the Waspi pension scandal.

A majority of councillors rejected a Labour motion and backed a call by the SNP to demand that Liz Kendall MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions allow MPs to vote on a compensation package denied in December.

Independent Andrew McGuire said local Labour MPs needed to put their “shoulders to the wheel” to support the call.

The Chief Executive will also write to local MPs Kirsteen Sullivan and Gregor Poynton urging them to back the women who had campaigned as the Women Against State Pension Inequality (Waspi).

The amendment, by Armadale councillor Lynda McKenna, won support across the chamber beating Labour’s motion by 19 votes to 12. It followed robust and, at times, emotional debate over the pensions rights of women in their late Sixties to compensation.

A seven-year investigation by the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#) found in March last year that the government was guilty of maladministration in the way that the changes to pension age had been introduced for women.

In many cases women born in the 1950s were unaware that the

pension age would rise after 2010, and many found themselves having to change plans and stay in work beyond the age of 60.

Depute SNP leader Pauline Stafford welcomed general agreement across the chamber that fair compensation was deserved but added: "An injustice this serious really needs more action. We should rage against this decision on behalf of these women."

Echoing comments made by the deputation she acknowledged that many of the women affected don't have time on their side, and she highlighted her own mother.

"A Waspi woman dies every 12 minutes. It's a shocking statistic. For me it was more shocking because my mum was one of those who died three weeks ago, aged 66, and I wanted to remember what one of those lives looks like. After a lifetime of work both paid and unpaid she saw just seven months of her pension and it came at a time when her health was already seriously deteriorating.

"She worked over 40 years in the NHS and like many went above and beyond. She worked night shift to look after myself and my brother then, like many women, she became a sandwich care,r looking after elderly relatives until just a few years ago until her own health failed.

"We know that women disproportionately bear this brunt of unpaid care work on top of their paid jobs. If Labour don't rectify this, what you are saying is that you are still not valued, still not good enough".

Councillor Stafford described the decision by the Government despite earlier promises that compensation would come, as a "really dangerous position" given the loss of trust in mainstream politics and the rise of protest parties such as Reform.

SNP Councillor Andrew Miller said: "Kind words and nods of support are welcome but only go so far. Action is needed. I

would urge my colleagues opposite to challenge the actions of its own party and push for a vote and a reversal of this dreadful decision.”

Lib Dem Sally Pattle said: “It has been disappointing to watch the actions of the Labour Government. They have demonstrated very clearly those sections of society that they seem to see as less deserving, first by removing the winter fuel allowance and then by the budget which has hit small and medium enterprises and they have now betrayed the Waspi women.

“For years the Liberal Democrats have campaigned for the Waspi women to be compensated fairly. I would like to say that I am supporting the Labour motion because it asks for fair compensation but I’m sorry it has come to this.”

Independent Andrew McGuire said: “There’s an inherent injustice in all of this. There was a social contract where women reasonably expected to retire at a certain age then all of a sudden the rug was pulled from beneath their feet. I’m minded support the amendment.

“We live in a representative democracy, and I think in this instance we need to send a message to our MPs that they need to put their shoulder to the wheel and help a little more. We should find the money to pay people what they deserve.”

The ombudsman had recommended compensation payments of up to £2,950 to those affected.

Carla O’Hara the co-ordinator of West Lothian Waspi Women led a deputation to a meeting of the full council and told the meeting that the decision by the government in December not to pay compensation for the maladministration came as a “shock”. Around 10,000 women are believed to fall into the Waspi category in the county alone.

A meeting earlier this month of 70 MPs in Westminster Hall

had backed a call to reverse the decision.

Ms O'Hara told councillors: "Surely an apology is meaningless if no steps are taken to right the wrong."

Labour's motion by Councillor Susan Manion had said: "Council is asked to write to the Prime Minister and ask that fair and proportionate compensation be paid to those women who have been impacted."

That didn't go far enough for the majority of councillors who criticised the Labour Government's refusal to consider any compensation programme or even allow a vote on the matter.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter