

Midlothian Council leader given increased security over the weekend

It is understood Midlothian Council leader Kelly Parry was given increased security over the weekend, with fellow councillors also adding extra safety measures following a backlash from members of the public to the pay increase.

The rise follows a review of councillor payments which was carried out nationally by the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee last year leading the Scottish Government to move 10 of the smaller councils up a grade, increasing leaders wages and basic councillor salaries.

The increase is not funded by council tax, and is paid for out of the Scottish Government budget – but the fact that it comes at a time when Scottish councils have been agreeing some of the largest council tax increases in 20 years has fuelled public anger over the decision.

Falkirk independent councillor Laura Murtagh revealed today she had received death threats after her motion to increase council tax there by 15.6% – the biggest increase in Scotland – was backed by other councillors.

And in a letter to the Local Democracy Reporter Councillor Parry said as a result of the increase being reported in the

media "some council leaders received death threats last week".

She said: "Councillors in Midlothian have also had to be provided with extra security resources over the last week, including enhanced security for myself over the weekend."

And she said in every case where a death threat was made "those council leaders (that received death threats) were women, and were received from men".

Midlothian Council, which has historically had the lowest paid councillors in Scotland, agreed the 56% pay increase for senior councillors at its budget meeting last month.

The increase was set by Cosla, the body which oversees local authorities in Scotland, and it was confirmed council leaders in smaller local authorities would be receiving a nationally approved 41% increase.

In Midlothian, it was additionally agreed that senior councillors who had been paid 67% of the council leader wage would now receive the maximum 75% pushing up the new salary, which comes into effect on April 1.

It is understood Cosla held a special meeting to discuss concerns about the reaction to the wage increases last week.

A spokesperson for Cosla said it has written to Police Scotland and the Scottish Government to raise concerns about councillors safety and referred enquiries to a statement issued by their president Councillor Shona Morrison on Friday marking International Womens Day, which addressed the issue.

In it Councillor Morrison said: "Following reported threats of violence and intimidation towards several of our female leaders, I wrote to the First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and Chief Constable of Police Scotland last week, requesting that we work collaboratively and seeking their support.

“Threats and intimidation against elected officials are never acceptable under any circumstances. We are grateful that Scottish Government and Police Scotland have stood firmly with us against such threats for elected councillors, which of course impact people across all levels of government.

“We will be contacting all Councillors in Scotland relaying Police Scotland’s advice for Councillors facing threats or intimidation in their roles. It’s our priority that our elected councillors receive the correct support if facing threats or intimidation.”

A spokesperson for Midlothian Council said they would not comment on the enhanced security measures being provided for the council leader, pointing out that to do so would be “a potential security risk”.

They added that the change in pay for all councillors in Scotland aimed to ensure the diversity and sustainability of councillors by removing barriers to holding elected office and enabling wider representation, adding that historically Midlothian has had the lowest paid councillors in Scotland, and the redistribution simply brought them in line with other neighbouring councils.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter