

West Lothian Council leader's salary set to top £50,000

West Lothian's Council Leader is set to get a £7,000 pay rise thanks to a review of pay across all 32 Scottish local authorities.

Following a review by the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) all councillors are considered now in a full-time job, with a hefty £4,000 plus hike in the offing for them too.

The growth of social media is largely behind the increased workload for councillors – and the main platform for criticism “with the majority also facing on-line personal criticism”, the council said this week.

Bigger salaries are also needed to encourage a a more representative profile of people to stand for election, the review body claimed.

The Council Executive is set to confirm the increases recommended in a new revised scheme for West Lothian.

These changes are set in regulations for every council in Scotland, and individual councils cannot accept or reject the changes. Individual councillors can choose not to accept their salaries.

The new salary scales will take Council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick's annual salary from £42,698 to £ 50,063; and increase of £7,365.

The Provost, Labour's Cathy Muldoon, will see her salary rise from £32,024 to £37,548; a rise of £5,524.

Senior councillors, those who hold committee chairs, will see their salaries rise from £31,131 to £37,059; a rise of £5,928.

The basic salary for a West Lothian councillor will reach almost £26,000, rising by £4,637, from £21,345 to £25,982.

All these salaries are set nationally by Holyrood and outwith the remit of the council. Full funding for the increase is provided by the Scottish Government, so there is no impact on services or Council Tax.

Despite the rise councillors will receive the lowest salaries of any elected representative in Scotland.

By way of comparison an MSP's basic salary is £74,506 a year whereas a senior ministerial job at Holyrood earns £96,999. The basic salary for local MPs is £93,904.

A report to the Executive said: "The independent Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) was reconvened in April 2023 to undertake an independent review of councillor remuneration, having last reported in 2011. SLARC was asked to review the remuneration of all councillors and to consider whether present levels of remuneration for ordinary and senior councillors were appropriate in the current context."

The report added: "Evidence gathered by SLARC showed that the low level of pay was one of the biggest barriers to elected office, increasing the payments available for councillors, aims to encourage under-represented groups such as women, those with disabilities, people under 55 and those from less affluent backgrounds to consider standing for election.

"Overall, the demographic make-up of Scotland's councillors

does not match the general population. While the role of the councillor can usually be undertaken on a part-time basis and senior councillor roles requires a full-time commitment, such distinctions between full-time and part-time are no longer appropriate.”

The report concluded: “Current remuneration levels are not considered to reflect the complexity of the role of the councillor, and this can be a significant barrier to potential candidates, as well as serving councillors.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter