

# **West Lothian's SNP group accused of "Trumpism in a kilt"**

**West Lothian's SNP group has been accused of "Trumpism in a kilt" over its rejection of survey results on Holyrood's mitigation of child poverty.**

A Labour councillor told the opposition leader at a meeting of the Executive that the if the result of fact findings didn't fit the party's point of view it "didn't make it false."

The survey in West Lothian found that the majority believed families should "take responsibility for their choices," rather than receive mitigation payments supported to counter the two-child cap on benefits, which the Westminster government has introduced.

A report to the council's executive said: "In West Lothian, in November 2024, the total number of families receiving universal credit with three or more children, was 1,745 with 123 families with five or more children."

Anti-Poverty Manager Nahid Hanif told a meeting of the executive: "Key themes to arise from responses were that: no child should have to live in poverty due to their parents not having sufficient income; people need to take personal responsibility for their choice to expand their family, and changes are needed at a base systemic level."

The SNP's policy offering support in mitigation of the two-child cap on benefits has been lauded by anti-poverty campaigners as a significant contributor to alleviating child poverty – but the local consultation into changes in the Holyrood policy produced a 64 per cent majority against.

The Executive heard that 52 responses came from a variety of sources including those who are members of the Lived Experience Panel – people who have experienced raising families in poverty.

Half of those surveyed had children.

SNP group leader Janet Campbell told the meeting that West Lothian Council should not put its name to the “pejorative” responses to the consultation.

Councillor Campbell told the meeting. “Obviously all people who responded have a view, but not all widely held views are necessarily correct I would suggest. We know that all widely held views are not necessarily correct.”

Council Leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick said: “I think it's for each individual when they are responding to anything to give their own view. We all come from different stables, different backgrounds, different religions, different politics. People see the world as they see it.”

Depute SNP leader Pauline Stafford asked if Ms Nahid could provide raw data as to the makeup of the 64 per cent majority who objected to the policy adding: “It would be interesting to get that figure to see what work we need to do to explain this policy.”

She added that the two-child cap introduced by the last Conservative government and continued by the Labour Government “has no place in a civilised society.”

An opposition amendment called for an extension to the

consultation time, and a new survey asking families with children, including single parents for their views.

Councillor Campbell said: "I am very concerned that as a public body West Lothian Council is seen to be promoting prejudice. There are some very prejudicial statements, and I'm extremely concerned that the council would appear to be promoting these."

Labour's Tom Conn responded: "Just because it doesn't fit with your view doesn't make it false. It's a truth that's being said by people because it's their opinions. Being dismissive of it doesn't help and doesn't take us forward.

"If it doesn't fit the SNP's view then it's not a valid view to have? That's quite stunning, it's almost Trumpism in a kilt."

Tory group leader Damian Doran-Timson said the "mask had slipped" for Councillor Campbell, adding: "As we saw back in 2014 with the referendum they didn't agree with, it means it was wrong."

He added: "We've actually heard today that she doesn't agree with the view therefore it's incorrect. The mask has not just slipped, it's fallen on the floor."

The report to the executive said: "Respondents argued that the government should prioritise funding for essential public services, such as local authority budgets, transportation, and infrastructure, rather than focusing on additional financial support for families.

"Some of the respondents from our lived experience panel reiterated their frustration with the idea of mitigating the two-child cap, emphasising that they themselves made personal financial decisions and could not rely on external support. The view was expressed that people should take financial responsibility for their choices.

“Some respondents communicated their belief that the current approach to supporting families is insufficient, pointing out that poor budgeting and financial mismanagement, including spending on cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and gambling, are contributing factors to the cycle of poverty. It was suggested that the government should instead focus on teaching families how to manage their finances and provide support that encourages long-term self-sufficiency.”

The report added: “It was suggested that the current policy indirectly discriminates against women, who are more likely than men to have caregiving responsibilities and also indirectly discriminates against families from some ethnic and religious communities, who are more likely to have larger families

“Responses commented that the government already provides significant assistance to low-income families through the Scottish Child Payment, free nursery hours, school meals, Best Start grants and clothing grants.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter