

West Lothian Council helps more than 7,000 children with school clothing costs

More than £1m a year to help families with school clothing costs has been paid out by West Lothian council.

The council offers among the biggest grants in Scotland in administering the Scottish Government scheme.

With more than 7,000 children helped with school uniform costs, councillors heard that an update on funding qualification will ensure that as many as possible can continue to get support.

Figures revealed to the council's Executive meeting showed that £1,206,450 was awarded in the school year 2022/23 to help 7,684 children; £1,255,530 in 2023/24 to help 7,882 and so far this year £1,187,250 to help 7,377.

In her report Nahid Hanif, the council's Anti-Poverty Service manager said: "To mirror the Scottish Government Free School Meals (FSM) criteria would severely restrict the number of families who would qualify."

Councillors approved of a plan which will increase income thresholds for applicants in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) by the same percentage increase as the National Living Wage of 6.7%.

Ms Hanif said: "This approach would also allow us to maintain

take-up levels and the support provided to low-income households.”

She added: “The purpose of maintaining the UC earned income threshold in line with the increase in the living wage is to maintain the number of families supported by this vital financial award as the cost of the school day increases.

“As a comparison, for the 2024/25 Academic Year, only 5,262 pupils would have received a school clothing grant if the criteria for free school meals was used compared to 7,377 pupils who were awarded a grant using the current methodology.”

The national level, set by Holyrood, suggests £120 for primary children and £150 for secondary age. However, since 2021 West Lothian has paid £150 for primary children and £180 for secondary.

West Lothian Council still remains one of the highest paying local authorities for grants, with Clackmannanshire, Highland and Shetland paying a higher amount. Only Falkirk and West Lothian use the same qualification calculations to allow as many families as possible to claim.

Councillor Pauline Stafford, depute SNP group leader told the meeting: “It’s fantastic that we have one of the highest rates and the highest uptake.”

Councillor Sally Pattle, Lib Dem said: “I really appreciate that you have looked at the human impact of the policy. It’s obvious the difference this has made to many thousand more children across West Lothian.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter