# Calls for reform as public sector board members' salaries soar



Recent analysis has uncovered the shocking levels of remuneration being awarded to board members of Scotland’s public sector organisations, raising urgent calls for reform to rein in excessive spending that explains the deteriorating state of public services. An investigation by the Daily Mail reveals that these board members collectively cost taxpayers nearly £9 million a year, despite the tightening of belts for ordinary citizens.

Among the most egregious examples is Willie Watt, the chairman of a state-owned bank, who pocketing £1,250 per day for a mere 48 days of work each year, raking in roughly £60,000 annually. This exorbitant salary is hardly justifiable when one considers the bank's establishment under former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, purportedly to revitalise the flagging economy while the everyday Scots grapple with rising living costs.

Deirdre Michie, chairman of Scottish Water, commands an annual salary of £105,086 for a part-time commitment of just two-and-a-half days a week – that’s £808 per day. This comes in stark contrast to the recent announcement of a nearly 10% increase in water bills for Scottish households, showcasing an alarming disconnect between leadership compensation and the financial strains placed on ordinary families.

Meanwhile, John Connaghan, chairman of NHS Lothian, earns £44,533 a year for a three-day workweek, equating to £283 per day. At a time when NHS Lothian is bracing for a £140 million funding gap in the forthcoming fiscal year, the priority remains on lining the pockets of the few rather than addressing critical patient care needs.

The findings, which were compelled by data from the Scottish Labour party, illustrate that public board member compensation is estimated to total approximately £8.93 million, with NHS boards alone costing taxpayers a staggering £1.8 million annually. Critics from opposition parties decry this as a “proliferation” of quangos under the Scottish National Party (SNP), where public funds appear to be siphoned away from critical services and redirected towards well-heeled executives.

Michael Marra, finance spokesman for Labour, highlighted the inherent injustice of the situation, stating, “While frontline staff in our hospitals, schools, and police service are burning the candle at both ends to keep essential services afloat, the SNP continues to dish out hefty salaries for board execs.” He urged a radical overhaul of the system, proposing a reduction in the number of health boards to ensure that resources are focused on the front lines where they are desperately needed.

The analysis has also revealed a troubling trend of multiple individuals holding various roles across public sector boards, with seven people reportedly juggling three or more positions. Notably, Peter Murray holds four roles, earning £24,415 for just 115 days of work annually.

Callum McGoldrick from the TaxPayers’ Alliance did not hold back in his condemnation of the situation, stating, “It’s utterly indefensible that these quango chiefs are pocketing thousands for a few days’ work while the public grapples with escalating costs.”

In the face of growing scrutiny, the Scottish Government claims it is striving to enhance the sustainability and efficiency of public services, pledging to save up to £280 million over the next two years. A government spokesman pointed out that the number of public bodies in Scotland has fallen from 199 in 2007 to the current 131, in a bid to portray a commitment to streamlining—yet the unwavering high salaries of public executives tell a different story entirely. The need for genuine reform could not be clearer; citizens demand accountability as they weather the storm of rising costs and diminished public services.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-sector-pay-strategy-2023-24-technical-guide/pages/8/> - This URL supports the claim about the pay strategy for public sector appointments in Scotland, including the criteria for determining daily fees for chairs and board members.
* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-sector-pay-strategy-2023-24-technical-guide/pages/2/> - This URL highlights the responsibilities of public bodies and the Scottish Government in setting pay for public sector staff and board members, aligning with the broader pay strategy.
* <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/scottish-public-sector-employment-and-pay> - This URL provides context on the overall public sector pay in Scotland, including recent increases and the financial pressures on the Scottish Government.
* <https://www.publications.scot.nhs.uk/files/dl-2024-30.pdf> - This URL discusses remuneration increases for NHS chairs and non-executive board members, illustrating specific examples of public sector remuneration.
* <https://www.publications.scot.nhs.uk/files/dl-2023-02.pdf> - This document details past remuneration policies for NHS boards, demonstrating how public sector pay is managed over time.