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Local authorities across Scotland have spent more than £627 million on exit packages for staff in the last six years, it has emerged.

Figures have shown more than 15,000 severance deals have been struck by councils for outgoing staff since 2011/12.

Over that time, the average package paid was £40,000.

The figures were published by Audit Scotland as part of a wider report into local government finances last month.

Last year alone, six severance deals a day were agreed by Scotland's 32 councils, at a cost of £78 million.

The Scottish Conservatives said local authorities, all of whom are under immense financial pressure, should tighten their procedures when it comes to golden goodbyes.

The same report by Audit Scotland stated that councils have £14.5 billion of debt, and some will have eaten through all their financial reserves within a couple years.

It added that £79 million in reserves was used last year for general running costs, and that 10 per cent of local authority budgets are spent servicing debt.

Scottish Conservative local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said:

“People will be horrified that hundreds of millions of pounds have been used in this way.

“Everyone understands the need for councils to become more efficient, and reducing the headcount in certain departments may be a way of doing that.

“But the average payout is £40,000, which means some senior staff will have been getting golden goodbyes to make the eyes water.

“In some cases contracts signed long ago may have dictated an overly-generous payment, but this is something local authorities need to clamp down on.

“There’s no point trying to make efficiency savings in one area while millions are being needlessly wasted in another.

“It’s no wonder some councils are burning through their cash reserves just to keep their head above water when this massive spend is considered.”