

Council takes the covers off Tourist tax once more

✘ The Transient Visitor Levy (Tourist bed tax by any other name!) raised its head again at the council meeting this morning, but was rejected by the SNP/LibDem administration who refuse to take the matter further with the Scottish Government.

The position is that the council cannot impose such a tax on its own without legislation from Holyrood. The government have made their position clear and have said that they will not consider the introduction of such laws. City hotel owners addressed the council in December when this was first mooted, and lodged a strong opposition to adding any charges to their room rates. But the alternative is that the council have been asked to investigate what is known as a Tourism sector Business Improvement District (BID).

Green Group convenor, Councillor Steve Burgess said:- “We should not give up trying to get Fergus Ewing to agree to a BID in Edinburgh in face of a PR onslaught from hotel owners.”

Labour Leader, Councillor Andrew Burns, called for a cross-party delegation to argue the case for an Edinburgh bed tax and said: – “I support this idea. We should not roll over so easily. The 1998 Scotland Act gives ministerial discretion on matters of local taxation, so I think it is worth going back to the minister to allocate this as a local tax which would allow us to decide whether to levy it or not. I think we should reconsider this. The idea of a bed tax has the overwhelming support of the Council. It could have huge benefits for our city and help sustain our festivals and events. I am willing to work together with all parties who wish to progress this matter . However, I find it extremely disappointing that SNP and LibDem councillors are unwilling to

join together with other councillors to help move Edinburgh forward.”

Councillor Jenny Dawe was forthright in her comments: – “It is ridiculous to refer this matter to full council. The views of the ministers are very clear. The Scottish Government has no plans to introduce a tourist tax. What we should be doing is exploring the potential of bringing in a tourism sector bid.

There are proven models in the world for example in California which offer flexibility on which businesses are affected by such a tax. We have to be practical about this in the face of Government opposition.”

For the Conservative group Councillor Joanna Mowat who represents the city centre where many hotels are situated said: – “Conservatives are against further taxes of this kind.”

The matter had been referred from the Policy & Strategy Committee on 28 February 2012 for discussion by the full council.