

Council to be quizzed over Lord Provost's expenses



The Lord Provost is the city's civic head, holds office as the Lord Lieutenant and in that capacity is the person who greets the Queen on her visits to the capital to hand over the keys to the city. The incumbent has a duty to represent and promote the city at a variety of civic engagements throughout the year as its principal ambassador.

We are perhaps all ambassadors for our city, but as an elected official the Lord Provost gets paid for his ambassadorial role.

The salary paid to all councillors is set out in a Guidance memo by The Scottish Government from 2010 which prescribed the sum of £36,528 in salary for the Lord Provosts of Glasgow and Edinburgh.

A question has been lodged for answer at tomorrow's full council meeting by Councillor Cameron Rose who is the Conservative Group leader and who represents the Southside/Newington Ward.

The full question is as follows:-

"Given the forecast spend of £433,000 by the Lord Provost's office on staff (an increase of 103% over the 2013/14 budget) and the explanation that the Lord Provost's office covers an unexpectedly large number of events, please provide

1. The number of events over each of the last five years
2. An explanation of why the budgeted 2.89 staff in the Lord Provost's Office has been augmented by four additional staff at a cost of £145,000 (not including

- the staff designated as city officers)
3. What has been the turnover of staff within the Lord Provost's Office in 2012/13 and 2013/14?
 4. How many of the anticipated 900 engagements organised by the Lord Provost's Office for 2013/14 have been/are anticipated to be attended/facilitated the Lord Provost and how many by his deputy and the five Baillies?"

We imagine that this question may have arisen after recent articles in [The Edinburgh Evening News](#) about the Lord Provost which focussed on some individual expenses incurred by his office, most notably the alteration made to the Lord Provost's kilt. These figures were, we understand, leaked to The Edinburgh Evening News before Christmas. While The Edinburgh Reporter has not had sight of such figures we have made our own enquiries, in the climate of some £31.7m cumulative savings which have to be made during the next financial year. The council's budget meeting next week will set the administration spending for 2014/15.

We understand that there are now 11 and a half full time jobs within the Lord Provost's office compared with 8 and a half previously allocated there. The Edinburgh Reporter has also been advised that the 'overspend' may be accounted for at least in part by the sums allocated to the Lord Provost's department being allocated differently from before, and that historically there may have been an accounting 'overspend' of £250,000, but we await the response to Councillor Rose's question at tomorrow's meeting to clarify the position.

As well as paying for staff, the Lord Provost's office is also responsible for salary and expenses relating to the Depute Lord Provost, Councillor Deidre Brock.

Over November and December the Lord Provost attended 55 events and made 30 speeches.

The main events which he attended included:-

Hordaland Night Light Christmas Lights Switch on with Chris Hoy – 24 November 2013

Hannukah lights switch on Menorah – 2 December 2013

Marie Curie Lights to Remember switch on – 12 December 2013

Lord Provost Christmas Party – 13 December 2013

Torchlight Procession – 30 December 2013

Shelter Scotland 45th Anniversary – 9 December 2013

There are 23 Deputy Lieutenants who include notable Edinburgh residents such as Ian Rankin, Sir Tom Farmer and former rugby player Sean Lineen. Although Deputy Lieutenants do not receive a salary they are entitled to claim for expenses which are also paid from the budget for the Lord Provost's department.

The Lord Provost has 5 Baillies who may represent him at events which he cannot fit into his busy schedule, and these include Councillors Norman Work, Melanie Main, Robert Aldridge, Angela Blacklock and Elaine Aitken. Any expenses they incur are also covered in this budget.

In addition the Lord Provost's budget also covers events such as the Hogmanay Party co-hosted with Councillor Steve Cardownie and the Christmas Party mentioned above, when the Lord Provost invites representatives of the community councils, other councillors and others who have perhaps been involved with fundraising during the year. The Lord Provost introduced the Community Garden Party at Lauriston Castle last summer when he invited 500 guests to join him in the gardens. The purpose of this was to recognise volunteers and unsung heroes otherwise overlooked. The event was supported by Virgin Money.

In the Revenue Budget Framework for 2014/15 to 2017/18 prepared in October last year the amount allocated to the Lord Provost's office is analysed and the gross expenditure allocated to the Lord Provost's office is stated as £0.39m for the current year. If indeed the Lord Provost's department has now spent £433,000 in the last year then that would appear to be an apparent overspend on the figure set aside for it.

Councillor Rose has made no claim for expenses in 2013-14 as yet, and only claimed £118.78 in the previous year for mobile phone charges.

✘ In terms of the Government Guidance all councillors are also reimbursed for their expenses relating to approved council business, including travel and subsistence expenses for approved duties. All travel claims start from the councillor's own home or residence, and the mileage charges are prescribed by Parliament. The Lord Provost has an official car which he uses for council business. In November 2012 he [blogged](#) about the possibility of replacing the official car with a Lexus which has not yet happened.

Several Freedom of Information [requests](#) have been made this year relating to the Lord Provost, the first lodged on 6 January. (Although the council is obliged to divulge any FOI requests, it does not have to identify the person making it.)

EDIR 2295 Lord Provost's formal engagements

How many of Donald Wilson (Lord Provost's) formal engagements since he took office have been formal dinners or lunches?

How many have involved formal dinners or lunches at some stage as part of the event?

Donald Wilson has attended 101 engagements as Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant since he took office, comprising or involving formal lunches or dinners.

How many have involved the offer of canapés and or snacks and drinks?

In addition he has attended 81 receptions where refreshments may have been served. A record of the refreshments offered is not held.

Lord Provost's kilt

Request no. 2366 Received: 10/01/2014, Resolved: 16/01/2014

The date the council initially paid for Lord Provost's kilt to be let out and the date the money, believed to be £250, was subsequently repaid.

This request has been answered thus:-

"We can advise you of the following in response to your request.

- The Council paid the invoice on 6 November 2013.
- £300 was repaid in cash on 20 November 2013 as confirmed by way of receipt from Corporate Transactional Services.
- The exact cost was £250 plus vat.
- No claim has been made by the Lord Provost for additional expenses incurred in carrying out civic duties."

We were advised by the council that the amount paid for alterations to the kilt was repaid by the Lord Provost who did not personally go to pick up the kilt after it was altered, leaving it for a city officer to deal with and then repay the sum to the council afterwards. What is clear is that the Lord Provost has paid for his own kilt alterations.

The [Guidance](#) sets out a further limit of £5,000 of expenses which the civic head may charge, and which would cover for example the cost of hiring clothes to attend civic functions or some sort of personal hospitality in connection with holding the office of Lord Provost.

A further FOI request has asked for copies of email correspondence into and out of the Lord Provost's office between 5 & 25 November 2013 but no answer has yet been offered. The council in common with all other public bodies affected by the Freedom of Information Scotland Act has 20 days within which to respond to the enquiry.