

Council to make U-turn on charges for sports facilities

Proposals to charge £35 an hour to use school sports halls have been axed after it was revealed that some clubs would fold if they had to pay the fees.

Research by council officers found that if the £35 per hour non-core charge was rolled out, clubs would be hit with extra costs of £84,250 over 40 weeks and £214,600 for clubs using PPP school facilities. The findings also revealed that “junior clubs that would bear the largest share of these costs”.

In June there was a public outcry about the plans and the city council agreed to “pause” rolling out the charges when a motion lodged by Green Cllr Alex Staniforth was passed.



Councillor Ian Perry

Education Convener Councillor Ian Perry will table a motion at Tuesday's Education, Children and Families committee, demanding that officers draw up a strategy for sports clubs to “access council facilities without additional charges being imposed” on them.

Cllr Perry said: "We paused the £35 increase in order to consult with the local clubs who were affected. The majority of local clubs would experience difficulty with that level of charge – some of them said they would even have to close if they had to put that charge on.

"What we will agree is to not levy the charge and ask the officials to look at different ways in which we can make more efficient use of our schools and our pitches.

"We are looking for efficiencies in terms of shared use and we want to do that on a voluntary basis so work will be undertaken with the clubs to see if we can make much more efficient use of the resources that we use."

Without the £35 hourly charge to use council sports facilities, the authority faces budget pressures of around £1m.

Colin McMillan, chairman of Clubsport Edinburgh, which represents 400 clubs across the Capital, said news of the u-turn was a "bitter-sweet feeling".

He added: " It's a worry that we have had to do this but I think the councillors have realised that clubs have got a reasonable part to play in Edinburgh's physical activity strategy.

"We are delighted but pretty concerned that we have had to do this to fight against the idea of clubs being closed."



Cllr

Alex

Staniforth

Cllr Staniforth said the council “simply cannot ignore” the impact on local clubs.

He added: “Overall, clubs would face an extra £300,000 in costs, with more than half of that falling on junior clubs. Some junior clubs would face price hikes of well over 200 per cent.

“If the council were to press ahead with the charges the money saved will be nothing compared to what would be lost in sports provision for young people.”

Adam Szymoszkowskyj from basketballscotland, added: “Prior to the £35 per hour non-core hours charge postponement, there was a real chance that sport clubs in Edinburgh would collapse. The postponement provided a limited rest-bite for clubs until the long term future of the ‘non-core’ hours was resolved.

“Should the decision be taken by councillors that the non-core hours be scrapped, sport clubs can continue to make the impact that they do without fear that they may go out of business. Long term, we need to ensure that clubs are not faced with getting priced out of their facilities again.”

All the papers for the Education Children and Families Committee meeting on Tuesday 11 December at 10.00am can be read [here](#).