

# Marketing Edinburgh boss says 'Give us the money from tourist tax'

Council funding, tourist taxes and marketing budgets remain in the spotlight today with a call for some thought on the way the proposed tourist tax in Edinburgh is paid.

Three quarters of the cities represented at the Spring Meeting of European Cities Marketing which is being held in Edinburgh this week are funded by tourist taxes paid direct to them. It does not pass through the hands of any council or other governmental organisation. This is what we were told by the Chief Executive of Edinburgh's embattled marketing organisation, Marketing Edinburgh.

Donnelly set the 200 delegates at the conference off by showing the T2 (Trainspotting) trailer explaining to them that most of the film was shot here in the capital, something made possible by Film Edinburgh, an integral part of the marketing organisation.

We wanted to speak with Donnelly who heads the body currently under threat of massive funding cuts in the council's draft budget plans, to find out his current state of thinking. Councillors will vote on the budget proposals at a full council meeting next Thursday.



John Donnelly of Marketing Edinburgh

**Mr Donnelly explained that it was Marketing Edinburgh who brought this relatively small but influential conference to the city.**

He explained: “We bring around £75 million of economic impact into the city through Convention Edinburgh which is part of Marketing Edinburgh. I think it’s worth saying that conference organisers buy cities not venues. They expect you to have a conference centre, an airport. Those are just tickets to the game.

“What you are actually bidding for is a city not a venue or an airport.”

I suggested to Mr Donnelly that Edinburgh has a lot to offer.

He replied : “Yes, but so do all other cities. There are 80 other cities in the room next door who would all argue that they’ve got a lot to offer and do you know what? They do. It’s a very competitive world out there.

“If Edinburgh rests on its laurels and becomes complacent, then it will suffer.”

I then asked the marketing boss about the funding cuts, and

where that placed the body within its peers represented at the conference. Mr Donnelly said : "Before the cut (which will lead to our demise), out of 54 among the 106 cities which are members of this organisation, Edinburgh has the seventh smallest budget for marketing. If the cut happens we will have the smallest budget in Europe. We can't exist.

"Edinburgh would have no marketing arm, no destination management, no-one selling conferences, no-one managing film, no-one looking after your brand and no-one looking after tourism.

"But if that is the ambition of Edinburgh, so be it."

I asked if there might be a counter-proposal in finding some funding for the marketing organisation elsewhere.

Mr Donnelly agreed, and said that they have already lodged such an idea with the council. He continued : "We went back to the council with a counter-proposal. Part of that is Marketing Edinburgh seeking its own funding. But remember that of the 80 cities here today three quarters of them have a tourist tax. That tax is paid via organisations like us, and doesn't go to the council. They have a different governance, and that's what we would argue. Fund us in the same way that other comparative cities are funded in Europe.

"All of the cities that get a tourist tax have two sources of funding : the council and a tourist tax. So that's what we would recommend. Edinburgh reckons it's an enlightened city. It must be very enlightened if they don't think that's the right way to do it when everybody else does."

The papers for the council budget meeting on 21 February are not online until tomorrow so we cannot tell you as yet whether there are any changes to the draft budget which was brought to the Finance and Resources Committee on 1 February.

A consultation ran until last week for all residents and

businesses to have their say on the terms of the draft proposals. There should be at least some feedback on that consultation published tomorrow (Friday), but we are told to expect further motions, amendments and addenda in the early part of next week.