

# **East Lothian Council to mothball a number of public buildings**

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

**Town halls and libraries are among a list of council-owned buildings which will remain 'mothballed' for the foreseeable future.**

East Lothian Council has said that a number of buildings which were taken out of public use during lockdown will remain closed because of enhanced Covid-19 cleaning and safety standards.

Councillor Willie Innes, council leader, said that while a relaxation of some guidelines was allowing a resumption of some public gatherings indoors, the local authority had taken the decision to keep doors closed to community buildings which had been used for years for community group meetings.

He said: "To meet the enhanced service standards now required to comply with Scottish Government and public health requirements to keep our customers and service users as safe as possible and enable us to continue to provide essential public services such as education, customer services, catering and cleaning, significant numbers of council staff have been redeployed to provide additional staffing.

"This essential redeployment of staff, coupled with the current public health guidelines requirements to clean buildings before and after each use, the requirement to collect customer details to support Test and Protect and the need to ensure safe physical layouts greatly stretches our

available resources.

"In addition, many of our community buildings are much-loved older buildings which do not lend themselves easily to safe operation in a 'Covid' world, with meeting spaces/rooms too small to contain 2m physical distancing layouts.

"For all of these reasons, unfortunately community buildings currently 'mothballed' will remain so for the foreseeable future."

Community groups, such as community councils, which would use the halls have been asked to continue to hold their meetings virtually, although the council confirmed that some had chosen to meet in alternative venues.

A council spokesperson said: "By doing business virtually, community groups are making a huge contribution to supporting our county-wide business critical activity, and supporting the revitalisation of our community life and economy by reducing the risks of creating unnecessary coronavirus 'bridges' between households and communities – which could lead to greater incidence of positive cases across the county, impacting on critical service delivery such as education."

Council buildings remaining closed are: Haddington Town House, Aldhammer House, Prestonpans, Innerwick Field Study (Outdoor) Centre, Prestonkirk Library, East Linton, Prestonpans Library, Ormiston Library, Gullane Public Library, East Linton Chambers, Tranent Town Hall, Macmerry Village Hall, Prestonpans Town Hall, Trevelyan Hall, Pencaitland, Musselburgh Town Hall, and Prestonpans Community and Resource Centre.

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