

Council will continue to lobby Scottish Government over Covid-19 restrictions

The City of Edinburgh Council has unanimously passed an Emergency motion expressing their 'regret' at the restrictions imposed upon Edinburgh in the most recent weekly review by The Scottish Government.

On Tuesday there was wide speculation that Edinburgh would move to Level Two of the Coronavirus Protection guidance, but the First Minister announced then that Edinburgh would remain for now in Level Three.

This has an obvious knock on effect on the city's economy, as hospitality opening hours are curtailed to 6pm in Level Three. By adopting the motion proposed by the coalition administration, the council now undertakes that it will continue to lobby The Scottish Government and insist that the government follows the scientific evidence and advice which they believe indicates that Edinburgh should be in Level Two.

The Council Leader said: "These are difficult decisions there is no getting away from that. There is a possibility that the cabinet took a decision which at the end of the day will be right in terms of a judgement that seemed to overrule the recommendations of public health officials. We will see in the coming days and weeks what our numbers are and whether that public health advice changes. But the fundamental is that we

have been waiting as a city for the numbers to go down and they have done, even though they are picking back up again.

“In this instance I do feel the Cabinet should have followed public health advice and led Edinburgh into Level Two. I very much hope that our numbers reflect that ongoing process. There are a few challenges facing our hospitality industry and the impact on our jobs is more serious than the rest of the country.

“I am going to continue that engagement with the government to get the appropriate level of restriction and support. Our city is an incredibly vibrant amazing place to live and that is in no small part thanks to the businesses in the city. Our success in suppressing the virus is still inextricably linked to our ability and willingness to follow the guidance. We must continue to do so.”

Depute Council Leader Cllr Cammy Day said that he did not agree that the Cabinet had made the correct decision and he thought the government had moved the goalposts. He said: “I simply don’t agree about the cabinet decision being right. In my opinion and given the public health guidance it was clearly wrong. And sometimes it’s okay for the Deputy First Minister or the First Minister to accept that they got it wrong. I think a number of people have tweeted that in the last few days showing the support for that view.

“Our figures in Edinburgh are lower than others in Scotland but Edinburgh has been left hanging again. But I do support the public health guidance and whatever tier we are in we must observe the measures to keep safe.”

Conservative Group Leader Cllr Iain Whyte suggested that in making the case for Edinburgh there should be reference to the available information on actual numbers and data.

The Scottish Government reviews the restrictions which apply to all 32 local authority areas each Tuesday.

The wording of the motion was:

Council commends residents and businesses (including the hospitality sector) who, through their hard work and adherence to guidance have driven Edinburgh's COVID transmission case numbers to within level 2 rates- along with all other indicators of the framework.

Council notes that the Leader and Chief Executive have met with public health officials and The Deputy First Minister weekly and have consistently made Edinburgh's case for the least restrictive level, within the context of public health's recommendations – putting the protection of residents as the first priority.

Further notes following regular engagement with businesses and trade bodies in the City, the Leader has also made the case for changes to support the specific circumstances of Edinburgh's businesses, wider society and economy.

Council seriously regrets that despite robust representations from Edinburgh Council to the Cabinet and public health advice supporting a case to reduce Edinburgh's level of restrictions to level 2, this has not happened.

Council notes a letter from the Scottish Government, requested by the Council Leader, giving an explanation of the Cabinet's decision will be published on the Council's website and emailed to members when received.

Council agrees to continue to lobby the Scottish Government and at next scheduled meeting insist the government follow scientific evidence and advice that indicates that Edinburgh have been consistently in Tier 2.

Council also agrees, if the recommendation is to keep Edinburgh in level 3, approach the Scottish Government and requests they allocate an appropriate level of funding to help

deal with the unique circumstances facing the Edinburgh economy which will to help protect as many jobs as possible.