

Schools energy bills to rise by more than 50 per cent

Energy bills payable for schools in Edinburgh are set to soar by more than 50 per cent this year as rising gas and electricity prices are made worse by tensions in Ukraine.

Projections published by The City of Edinburgh Council show the cost of powering the city's nurseries and primary and secondary schools will rise to an estimated £9 million in the year from April – up from £5.7 million in 2021 to 2022.

The amount spent by the council on heating and electricity for schools has largely returned to normal following a reduction of nearly £1 million (16 per cent) during the pandemic, when premises were closed during term time between March and July 2020 and again from January to Easter 2021.

A report to councillors states electricity and gas prices have remained “relatively static” over the past 12 months with “modest variation, largely due to market disruption caused by the pandemic”.

But it said that despite the vast majority of pupils learning from home, many schools remained open with heating systems still operational, whilst the need more more ventilation in classrooms to reduce the spread of Covid-19 has also resulted in “increased gas use as mechanical systems work to meet higher demand for heating.”

The report continued: "This requirement for increased ventilation has continued throughout 2021 to 2022 and is leading to higher gas use across the learning estate."

Forecasting for the year ahead, the report goes on to warn of "significant cost increases on the horizon" – with a 21 per cent rise predicted for the cost of electricity and gas rates set to more than double.

It said: "Extraordinary market conditions caused by a fear of European gas shortages coupled with heightened tensions in Eastern Europe has seen wholesale costs for gas and electricity hit record highs."

Already soaring gas prices climbed even higher last week when Germany halted the approval of Russia's major Nord Stream 2 pipeline just days before its invasion of Ukraine.

With nearly two-thirds of the council's school energy budget spent on gas, rising costs combined with a price cap adjustment of 54 per cent due to come into effect from April will have the greatest financial impact on schools' energy bills.

The council says it is planning for the future by requiring all new schools to be more energy efficient by being built to 'passivhaus' standard.

There are currently plans in place for eight new schools to meet this carbon negative specification including Maybury Primary School, due to be completed next year, and the new Currie High School which is scheduled to open in 2024.

The council is also looking into the feasibility of retrofitting a number of educational facilities to improve the "thermal and energy performance of buildings".

Included in the list of schools being reviewed as part of the ongoing pilot scheme is Brunstane Primary School, Hermitage

Park Primary School, Lorne Primary School and Trinity Academy.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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