

Libraries and community centres could be used to keep warm this winter

'Heat banks' could be set-up in Edinburgh's libraries, community centres and gyms this winter to offer residents struggling to pay energy bills a place to keep warm.

The idea has been put forward by two city councillors ahead of a meeting of full council on Thursday when members will discuss the worsening cost of living crisis, which may plunge millions across the UK into fuel poverty in the coming months as temperatures drop and prices rise further.

In April the average cost of household energy bills rose by more than 50 per cent, with the energy price cap expected to reach around £3,576 in October and potentially rising to over £6,000 by next April.

Meanwhile, inflation could climb as high as 15 per cent in the final quarter of 2022, putting further strain on struggling households.

The heat banks are set to pop up across the country in response to the crisis to ensure those unable to heat their homes can keep warm and safe elsewhere.

SNP councillor Euan Hyslop is calling on officials to "identify all public buildings in the city which could be used as warm spaces for public access".

This could include libraries and community centres, and Cllr Hyslop is also requesting the council to invite its partner organisations such as Edinburgh Leisure to look at the possibility of making use of their spaces,

He is also looking at opening up his own business, the Dower House Café in Corstorphine, as a heat bank and hopes other organisations in the private and third sectors will do the same.

Cllr Hyslop said: “The rate of the increase is what is most concerning at a time when food prices and general cost of living is going up.

“The hope is that the council will act on the points within the motion and the report will be clear on what buildings can be opened up.

“It’s very much for the council to lead and then that sets the tone for other organisations to look at their capacity to do similar things.”

Cllr Stephen Jenkinson has submitted a similar motion and wants “warm and welcoming spaces” in council buildings to run support and advice services to maximise help for people facing food and fuel poverty.



Cllr Stephen Jenkinson Labour, Pentland Hills Ward

Cllr Jenkinson said: "Now is the time to start planning rather than waiting until it's too late.

"I'm asking the council to investigate opening up their buildings – libraries, community centres and working with our partners potentially – throughout this winter to the public so that they've got somewhere warm to go to in the evening as we're going through a period of increasing domestic energy price inflation.

"It's about looking after our citizens and it's about providing a temporary service in a difficult time to hopefully alleviate some of the worst effects of having to choose between feeding the meter and feeding their children.

"I have very real concerns that over this winter, not just with the price of heating bills but with inflation in general, that a lot of our citizens are going to find it very, very

tough indeed and we have a responsibility as a council to look after as many citizens as possible.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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The council meeting on Thursday 25 August begins at 10am at the City Chambers. Anyone can [watch online here](#).



Edinburgh Central Library. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
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