

Council officers worked long days during Operation Unicorn

Council officers in Edinburgh worked 18-hour days as the capital was front and centre of events after HM the Queen's death, a councillor has claimed.

It comes amid calls for reassurance that the council will not be left "holding the bill" for Operation Unicorn, and for the total cost to the local authority to be detailed in a report.

Within hours of the announcement of the Queen's passing earlier this month council bosses began logistical preparations for the arrival of the late monarch's coffin, the new King and other members of the Royal Family.

It was quickly confirmed Edinburgh would host various events including a procession and funeral at the Royal Mile attracting huge crowds. This operation had been rehearsed many times over recent years.

With schools, roads and local services impacted, council officers were mobilised to help plan and manage the operation, which was led by both the UK and Scottish Governments as well as the Royal Household.

But questions were raised about its cost and impact on staff at a recent full council meeting.

Cllr Ben Parker, Greens, said some officers "were working 18 hour days" following the Queen's death.

And he asked: "Was this always part of the plan? "If it was, why?

"If it wasn't, why did it become necessary – and does the council leader agree that that is unacceptable?"

Council leader Cammy Day, Labour, said: "I think there were changes made by the Royal Household which were out with our control which maybe led to that."

He added: "Absolutely no, we shouldn't be expecting officers to work 18 hours a day.

"I think given the exceptional circumstances there was obviously huge pressure to get things done in a very very short period of time."

Councillor Day said council bosses "were here more or less 24 hours a day along with a whole number of officers across the city."

He added: "I think we've all commended the work the officers have done but there shouldn't be a need to work 18 hours a day and I have to take that up with the chief executive."

The Green Group's Alys Mumford submitted an emergency motion noting "considerable extra work and costs" incurred by Edinburgh. She called for a report outlining the total cost to the council containing information on overtime worked by officers and details of overspend on Operation Unicorn .

Lord Provost Robert Aldridge did not rule the business urgent and said the motion would be heard at the next council meeting.

However, the matter was later raised by Labour's Katrina Faccenda, who asked the council leader: "Could you give a commitment to the council what we'll be presented with a full report of the cost to the City of Edinburgh of Operation Unicorn and the impact on service delivery across the city?

“Especially I’m looking for reassurance that we’re not going to be left holding the bill on behalf of the Scottish and UK Governments.”

Cllr Day said: “I have had a discussion with the chief executive recently and we are gathering all the costs associated with the host of the Queen’s funeral here in Edinburgh.

“I know there have been constructive discussions with the UK and Scottish Governments, in fact I think the treasury paid for part of the operation as did the Scottish Government but we will put forward a robust report on that and share that with members through committee.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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