

Call for more transparency over spending on royal visits

Calls have been made for more transparency around how much The City of Edinburgh Council spends on royal visits.

It comes after the council successfully claimed back nearly £600,000 from the UK Government for costs incurred by the city last year for events held to mark HM the Queen's death.

The capital has historic links with the monarchy and hosts Royals throughout the calendar year but the total cost to the council – and ultimately the taxpayer – is unknown.

Councillors questioned why this was the case at the Finance Committee on Thursday.

Cllr Alys Mumford initially called for a report following Operation Unicorn – the codename for the plans triggered by the Queen dying at Balmoral last September – detailing how much the council had spent on the ceremonies and lying at rest.

The Green councillor also requested information on the “costs associated with future planned visits from Charles III or other members of the monarchy”.

However, the sum has not been disclosed by the council, which said only that the costs were included in the Lord Provost's Office's £506,518 budget and the £3.9 million Capital City Supplement payment from The Scottish Government.

A report stated: "At the time of writing, the only confirmed official engagements comprise 14 engagements by HRH The Princess Royal over the period January to June 2023. The visits in question reflect HRH's various patronages and key roles such as Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh."

Cllr Mumford said she was "disappointed" at the contents of the report she had requested.

"Currently I don't think it speaks to the clause of the motion it's intended to address," she added.

"This is about financial scrutiny, and making sure that we're spending intentionally and transparently.

"For example I'm sure the work to reclaim the costs of Operation Unicorn would have been undertaken by officers anyway as part of their role, but we should have been able to regain those costs with public scrutiny and with councillors all being aware of the situation.

She said there was more appetite among councillors for more details on "the role of the Lord Provost's office, our unique spending as a capital and how we engage with Royal visits".

However Cllr Phil Doggart took a different view and said: "I think we're in a situation of running into rabbit holes here designed to suit one particular agenda that I don't think is particularly helpful.

"This goes above and beyond our responsibilities as a council.

"There's something we have a city, the fact we're a capital city has something on top of that and I think that is one of the welcome aspects of being a city that has such a long history, has such a standing in the United Kingdom and I think that's just one of the costs we have."

The committee voted in favour of calling for another report on the cost of Royal visits and the capital city supplement's

relationship to royal visits.

by Donald Turvill

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