

Edinburgh's Christmas attracts more than two million visitors

The new production company UniqueAssembly which had bid successfully to run the events at Hogmanay suddenly found itself also delivering all the Christmas events after the Edinburgh's Christmas deal collapsed.

Now the company formed by Unique Events and Assembly Limited has paused to tot up some numbers.

- More than 2.4 million people visited the three sites in East and West Princes Street Gardens and on George Street
- The Forth 1 Big Wheel carried more than 140,000 people up into the sky above Princes Street Gardens
- More than 66,500 people skated at the Lidl on Ice Experience on George Street supported by Essential Edinburgh.
- More than 82,000 locals got the EH postcode discount on tickets
- More than half of the stall holders at the Christmas Market were local companies.
- More than 6,000 free tickets were donated to 30 charities and community groups
- The event supports a number of charities with

fundraising initiatives

- Twelve winners of Winter Windows had their artwork displayed on the top path of West Princes Street Gardens.

The Directors of UniqueAssembly said: "It has been an extraordinary challenge to take on this large-scale event at such short notice as production costs rocketed, and the cost-of-living crisis, train strikes and weather all contributed to peoples' decision to visit the city centre. Given this, we are delighted that Edinburgh was busy throughout the Festive season, and Edinburgh's Christmas attractions proved so popular with residents as well as visitors. Overall, it has been an incredible success story. One little boy was overheard saying, "it's like being in a movie". This kind of magic is what makes Christmas so special."

PREVIOUS CONTRACT COLLAPSED

There was a bit of a rush to save Edinburgh's Christmas back in October when one of the partners in the consortium which had won the bid to stage events in the capital suddenly withdrew from the deal.

Mitchell Taylor, is a Director of a new company called Visionar Limited, set up along with Adam David Kohlert in May last year to run the financial side of the Edinburgh's Christmas contract. Mr Taylor is also a director of Taylors Leisure Limited, and Mr Kohlert is a director in Angels Event Experience Limited (AEE) and both companies delivered aspects of the Christmas contract in past years when it was produced by Underbelly. Taylors for example provide the rides and shows, and AEE managed the Christmas market.

It was claimed that Mr Kohlert withdrew unilaterally from the contract that Visionar had entered into with The City of Edinburgh Council, (although all the council papers say this

was granted to the company AEE) while offering a sum by way of payment. In terms of the original contract the new Christmas contractor was to pay a total of £5.7 million over five years. We understand that Mr Kohlert offered to pay less than £200,000 to the council, presumably for this year alone.

At the council's Finance & Resources Committee on 10 October – an emergency meeting called to award the contract to the new company Unique Assembly – councillors agreed that it was regrettable there had not been regular updates for councillors, that the council would award a contract for a year to Unique Assembly with an option for a further year, but only on consideration of a post event report early in 2023. Officers were told to prioritise local stallholders who might have already signed up with original contractor.

The agreement is that the matter can be considered again within six months (usually contrary to the council's standing orders) and there will be a report of the procurement process and what changes might be made to that in future.

Most of the meeting of 10 October was held in private due to the confidential nature of the discussion, but before it went offline it was clear that opposition councillors felt aggrieved by the lack of communication which had been promised in June.

FURTHER COMMENT

City of Edinburgh Council Leader Cammy Day said: "Edinburgh's Christmas certainly remains one of the UK's favourite winter destinations. Our absolute priority was to ensure that we provided high-quality festive celebrations for the city – and that these be delivered in the spirit of the feedback received in our consultation with residents, businesses and stakeholders.

"With a footfall of over 2 million to this year's festival,

there's no questioning the popularity Edinburgh's Christmas or the benefits it brings to the Capital – the enjoyment and wellbeing of our residents, but also the economic impact for our businesses and the city as a whole. I'm delighted that so many residents and visitors enjoyed all that was on offer.

“We are especially proud of the opportunities it affords to raise funds for local charities and the free tickets donated to charities and community groups helped spread Christmas joy across the city.”

Roddy Smith, CEO of Essential Edinburgh said: “The Christmas period is so important to the city centre's business community, and Edinburgh's Christmas activities are vital to bringing residents and visitors into our fantastic and vibrant city centre. The success of this year's celebrations was a real team effort and we were delighted to support the great work of UniqueAssembly and City of Edinburgh Council. With more time to plan for Christmas 2023, I am sure we can look forward to an even bigger and better Edinburgh's Christmas later this year.”

