

Eurovision bid at show ground would have cost council millions

A bid to bring the Eurovision song contest to Edinburgh indicated the council was in a financial position to provide up to £17.6m to host the event, documents have revealed.

This is despite a £76 million hole in the local authority's budget which councillors will work on balancing next month.

It was proposed that Eurovision would be held at the Royal Highland Centre if Edinburgh was picked as the host city. The council also said it stood ready to set-up a 12,000-capacity 'Eurovision Village' in the city centre, a Freedom of Information request (FOI) showed.

Although the capital did not make the shortlist – with Liverpool announced as host of Eurovision 2023 – council leader Cammy Day said he did not regret making an application and rejected claims that Edinburgh “never had a chance”.

He has also suggested the failed bid could be an opportunity to look at how Edinburgh hosts large scale events in future, and re-open the debate about whether the city needs a new venue.

Details of Edinburgh's bid were made publicly available following a FOI request by the Local Democracy Reporting Service (*a public service news agency, funded by the BBC,*

provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners). The council initially refused to release the documents over concerns they could harm “commercial interests” – however it later admitted this response was “not appropriate”.

In the application the council claimed that the city has extensive experience hosting large scale events and said Edinburgh was “prepared and ready to deliver an unforgettable and unprecedented Eurovision Song Contest”.

Asked if the local authority was in a financial position to contribute up to €20 million (£17.6 million) to the event’s costs, the council replied it “understands the levels of financial and other resource commitment required” and added it would reach out to partners and potential sponsors for help meeting the costs.

However with no guarantee the full amount could be raised in time for May when Eurovision takes place, there was a risk the city would be forced to pay over millions despite facing a deepening financial crisis with a £76 million gap in the 2023/24 budget.

Cllr Day said there was “no way” the council would have spent €20m on hosting the international music competition.

“We would have supported it,” he added, “we would have worked with partners and I’m sure a number of the city’s investors would be keen to have their name on all this as well. But there was no [financial] commitment.”

In December SNP councillors called on the Labour administration to release the bid sent to the BBC so the council could learn from the process to inform any future applications for large scale events but the group’s motion was voted down by a majority of members in the chamber.

Lib Dem group leader Kevin Lang said at the meeting he was

“not that bothered” about the content of the bid, arguing the city “never had a chance” in the first place due to not having a big enough indoor arena.



Leader of The City of Edinburgh Council Cllr Cammy Day. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Cllr Day said this week: “We considered it, we sent it off to the Chief Executive, the head of culture and all the group leaders were asked about this and every one of them supported us putting a bid in.

“The only venue we had is the Royal Highland Show ground which was available at that time, has the capacity, it’s near to a tram stop, it’s by the airport and there’s a bus service from the airport every 20 minutes or so. On that basis we put a bid in for it.”

He admitted there were “cities that had better options than us” but added: “Why should I as the council leader not be trying to get international, global events into my city?”

He continued: "I think there's a call for us now quite rightly to look at how the capital city of Scotland, which is growing every week, hosts these major events going forward. Should we always have to travel to Glasgow or to Manchester and Newcastle for events? Or should we be saying the capital should have a proper venue.

"This has spurred an opportunity. That might be entirely unaffordable or it could be something we could work on."

SNP councillor Danny Aston said: "It's good that the bid has finally been released and we can see what can be learned from it.

"Disappointingly this is only after the Labour administration voted against the SNP's request for basic transparency and the Conservative group supported Labour in that, like a puppet on a string."

by Donald Turvill

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