

Council Leader's Taiwan visit given approval

The Council Leader, Cllr Cammy Day will visit Taiwan next month to attend the 2023 Asian Smart City summit in Taipei.

He will also engage with representatives from Taipei, Tainan City and Kaohsiung City to explore opportunities to build on the long cultural, scientific and educational relationships between Edinburgh and Taiwan.

There will be no cost to the council as the visit is made at the invitation of the Government of Taiwan who will fund all costs.

That is not to say this was passed on the nod. Far from it. Most parties in the chamber wanted to have their say on the proposed visit in one way or another, and the matter had to be put to a vote.

The Culture Convener who is a fellow Labour councillor said that this was an opportunity to build cultural links with Taiwan, and she recalled the beautiful performances by Taiwanese performers last summer during the Festival.

She expressed a reservation about climate change and the flights involved, and asked that the council would look at doing this in a more environmentally way in future.

She said however: "We want people to come to conferences here so it would be hypocritical to say we won't go anywhere."

Cllr Stuart Dobbin knows Taiwan well but commented that the report had “lots to say about Taiwan” but little about the deliverables from such a visit. He criticised the report for being very vague and said: “In these challenging times to act upon a vague objective is not what this council should be doing at present.”

Cllr Danny Aston confessed to knowing little about the destination, but had quickly Googled the country and found that the temperatures at the time of Cllr Day’s visit will be in the order of 20 degrees. “Sounds lovely,” he said. “But is this really a good time for the Council Leader to be jetting off to Taiwan? In the middle of the worst cost of living crisis we have experienced in a generation with spiralling heating bills and basic foods like tea, bread and butter increasing by huge amounts. The Council Leader knows the regard that the SNP Group will submit. He knows the cynics out there will view this trip as frivolous as a junket – perish the thought.

“So we just want the Council Leader to be armed with the facts, so he can look us all in the eye and say this trip is worthwhile, that it’s worth the time and the airmiles while leaving the governing of our capital city at this difficult juncture.”

Cllr Staniforth said: “We as a capital city should absolutely support Taiwan. Taiwan has a right to live free and independent. We see what happened in Ukraine when expansionistic neighbours think they can annexe nearby countries with no consequences. And we have seen in Tibet what happens when that turns out to be true.

“One of the best ways we can do that as a city is with partnerships. Nor are we necessarily against attending conferences in faraway places, but we are facing a climate catastrophe. And while this one flight’s carbon footprint may not be very high in the scheme of things, we have a position

of leadership. We should be leading the way in how we look at flights and how necessary they are. We should not condone any such flights without a clear explanation of what is hoped to achieve by engaging in them and what the climate impact of them will be. That is a small thing to ask, and regrettably has not been given in this report. We wish to defer that element till the next council meeting.”

Cllr Day said: “I think as any international city we should be making our presence across the world. And under the last administration the SNP were not shy to send people four times to China and to Canada, and other countries.”

The motion to allow the visit was carried by 33 votes to 27.

The council will work with the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, and the University of Edinburgh progress a future programme of activity in Edinburgh. The Royal Botanical Gardens of Edinburgh continue to exchange plant species with Taiwanese partners and Edinburgh Zoo has exchanged small animals with zoos in the country.

The links of friendship between Scotland and Taiwan are traced back more than 150 years to when Scottish missionaries brought modern medicine, printing machines as well as tap water systems to Taiwan. Dr James Maxwell from Edinburgh established Taiwan’s first hospital in the 19th Century.

This visit comes after a series of discussions held during 2022 when Taiwanese officials welcomed the opportunity of working with Edinburgh to deepen the relationship and collaborate to contribute to the global economy.



Cllr Cammy Day Council Leader