

Emergency fund will help galas in Midlothian

An emergency fund to help local galas pay for this year's events is set to be launched as Midlothian Council looks to increase licence costs by up to 100 per cent.

Councillors will be asked to approve a wide range of increased charges put forward by officers next week as they look at ways to avoid cutting services.

However a decision to increase public entertainment licences by between 50 per cent to 100 per cent, depending on the number of people taking part, has sparked concerns it could put galas at risk.

And in a paper going to council on Tuesday, it is recommended a transition fund is established for one year to ensure this summer's events go ahead as recognition of the work volunteers have done to organise them in the wake of the pandemic.

The report says: "The increase in civic licences includes public entertainment licences (PEL), which are required for community groups to hold gala days or community fun days, community fireworks events and Christmas lights switch on events.

"It is acknowledged that many of these events are volunteered and rely on fundraising throughout the year to cover costs.

“Most gala day committees or organisations will have planned and budgeted for their summer events prior to the council meeting; and

will not have had the opportunity to include increased licence costs into their forecast spend.

“To avoid any negative impact on this years’ events, recognising the significant value these have on community cohesion and the hard work of volunteers to hold these whilst still recovering from covid, it is proposed that a one year transition fund be established for community groups to access to cover the increased costs in licence fees.”

The new increased PEL charges will see a three year licence for events with less than 1,000 people attending go up by 50 per cent from £262 to £393, with the increase for events of between 5,000 and 10,000 people rising by 75 per cent to £1,834 while at the top end for events of 10,000 people it will double from £2,096 to £4,192

Licence renewals will also go up at the same rate as will temporary one off PEL applications.

Among increases included in the extensive list to go to councillors for approval next week are a 20 per cent increase in burial fees for adults which will rise from £827 to £992.

Children up to the age of 18 remain free of charge.

And there are plans to increase parking fines from £60 to £100.

The report to councillors says of the increase in burial charges: “Benchmarking carried out with other local authorities show that overall Midlothian is charging less than other councils.”

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

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