

Council decides against drug testing for staff

The City of Edinburgh Council has decided against introducing drug testing for staff, as a councillor dismissed the practice as “invasive” and “unnecessary”.

A review of the council’s alcohol and drug policy was carried out following recommendations arising from an independent inquiry into organisational culture.

Councillors previously considered the implementation of testing the workforce in 2017 but did not proceed – and the same decision was taken again this week as the new policy was presented for approval.

A report to the policy and sustainability committee this week stated: “This Policy is aimed at promoting a culture where the approach is preventative, where open and honest conversations are encouraged so that the signs can be identified, and dependency problems can be effectively mitigated against as much as possible.

“We also considered the introduction of testing of all colleagues in the workplace.”

The report said this could include ‘with cause’ and random drug tests on staff.

However it added testing for substances “at this stage may be too premature”.

“Rather focus should first be on providing additional guidance and training to support managers in having these types of conversations with colleagues and managing these situations in the first instance from a well-being perspective.

“As a result, we are recommending the status quo at this stage and to review the introduction of testing again at the appropriate time.”

“It should also be noted that any proposal to introduce a testing regime is unlikely to be supported by trade unions at this stage.”

The Greens tabled an addendum calling for the drug and alcohol testing policy to only return to councillors if they requested it.

Green councillor Alex Staniforth said: “Drug and alcohol testing at work is invasive. There are several different types of drug and alcohol testing, but I don’t think there is any that could be considered entirely uninvasive.

“It’s also unnecessary, managers should be able to tell if their employees are capable of continuing doing their job on a given day or not.

“The unions also dislike the idea of drug and alcohol testing for this exact reason.

“I really think that given that in 2017 we said we didn’t want this to happen I don’t feel the council has changed enough in its political make-up that we’re suddenly going to turn round and say we do want this to happen.”

However, Conservative group leader Iain Whyte said the Greens’ addendum was “entirely unnecessary”.

He said: “There’s not any push to be doing anything right now, there’s just an opportunity left open.

“I think we should be taking our officers’ advice around some of this. And I can think of situations where some testing might be appropriate. I know, for example, that Scotrail regularly tests drivers of trains, I know Lothian Buses has policies on this and it and it may well be that we have people that are in driving situations and the like where it might become useful and necessary at some point in the future.”

Conservative councillor Jo Mowat added: “I’m always wary when you remove potential tools from toolboxes, and then the remedy is at some point if there’s a problem we’ve got to move a motion to council, convince everyone that we need that – and that is almost certainly going to be at a time that would be extremely difficult and would become a massive issue.

“I would have concerns if we took this out.”

The Conservatives moved the report as presented without the Greens’ additions and were defeated 15 votes to 2 upon going to a vote.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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