

Christmas and Hogmanay to be offered as one contract

After earning only tens of thousands from the previous Christmas contract, the council has had a rethink about the way the festive events are run in future.

The council now say that the best way forward for the Winter Festivals is to award the contracts for Edinburgh's Hogmanay and Christmas events as one deal from 2025 onwards, with conditions imposed about protection for trees in Princes Street Gardens and to encourage moving some of the events outside the city centre.

This is a result of questions raised over the procurement process used to appoint the contractor to run Edinburgh's Christmas in 2022. That contractor, Angels Event Experience, withdrew from the contract at the beginning of October as [they claimed they were unable](#) to deliver all parts of the deal.

The Surrey based company, involved in the delivery of the

markets for several years, and the same business which will continue to deliver Christmas in Hyde Park in London, was due to pay more than £5 million to the council to run the festivities in Edinburgh for three years.

The council turned to the company in charge of Edinburgh's Hogmanay, Unique Events and also Assembly Festival to fulfil the contract in the capital, and in March this year the company was again awarded the contract for Edinburgh's Christmas for a further year. The Christmas festivities run over four to six weeks attracted [two million visitors](#) in 2022.

Previously when the events were run as two separate contracts the council subsidised Hogmanay with a contribution of £800,000. When the two were run as one it appeared that Christmas also supported Hogmanay financially with a subsidy of around £0.2 million. The total cost of delivering Christmas is around £3 million – “with income expected to meet the cost in full”.

It also emerges from the report that the previous contract (which we presume was that entered into with Underbelly for several years) was run on a profit share model – and the council's return on that contract was a mere £0.032million – yes that is £32,000 – earned over several years. There are clear concerns expressed that “the

council was being denied the opportunity to secure income from this contract”.

In November 2021 the council was advised that the events were welcoming for tourists but less so for residents. There was also a view that the events were not environmentally sustainable, and were expensive to visit. In a consultation, residents offered a view that alcohol or funfair rides are the least attractive parts of the event, and many asked for the festivities to be spread over the city rather than concentrated in the city centre.

After an open procurement exercise the contract for Christmas was awarded in June last year for a period of three years, but this had collapsed by late September.

SNP Group leader Cllr Adam McVey lodged a motion on 27 October 2022 asking that the matter of the Christmas Market delivery was reexamined to ensure quality, reliability, community engagement, support for local traders and sharing celebrations around the city, with a rider that the council's All Party Oversight Group asks local traders and community groups for their input on extending the festival outside the centre.

The answer to that is contained in the papers for the additional Culture and Communities Committee meeting which is being held this Thursday, and it recommends a new approach to where the events are sited, adhering to Tree Protection Measures in Princes Street Gardens, refreshing the programme content making sure it is attractive and accessible, ensuring that the plans meet the council's net zero ambition and also that local traders are encouraged to take part.

There are various models of delivery also set out in the report but the in-house model where the council would run the events is the least favoured as they do not have the skilled

staff to do so.

The committee will discuss the various options and the recommendation on Thursday.

[The papers are here.](#)



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