

Council proposes funding solution for Edinburgh Leisure

The council plans to allocate £3.2 million for Edinburgh Leisure in the next financial year which will ensure that the body can pay its staff the Real Living Wage and that no venues will be forced to close.

In papers just released council officers have proposed funding to cover the cost of reinstating the Real Living Wage for all Edinburgh Leisure employees, and to fill a total projected gap of £3.2 million.

The Real Living Wage is a voluntary pay scheme based on the cost of living and sets a minimum hourly rate of pay people need to “get by”. At present the rate is £12 per hour outside London. It contrasts with the Minimum Wage which is statutory and is currently £10.18 all over the UK.

Edinburgh Leisure said that the call to pay staff at the higher rate would have increased their costs by £473,000 in the current financial year and by £800,000 in 2024/25. The organisation found savings of around £400,000 to avoid the anticipated budget deficit of £3.6 million and the council is proposing to plug the remainder of the funding gap.

Council Leader Cammy Day told The Edinburgh Reporter: “I’m really, really grateful to my colleague Cllr Mandy Watt, the

Finance Convener. We have been meeting with Edinburgh Leisure and with senior officers over many weeks now to try and have some resolution both to fund the real living wage for Edinburgh Leisure employees and to give them a bit of additional support. This is a really difficult time for them with huge energy bills heating our many leisure centres and pools in Edinburgh. I am really grateful for that and pleased that the Labour administration have managed to find that money in this year's coming budget but that does come with huge pressures across the whole estate and across the whole council budget. I will continue to work with Edinburgh Leisure to find a long term solution to their funding issues.

"I know Edinburgh Leisure will also bring in a new chief executive soon, so firstly, I want to thank Chief Executive, June Peebles, for her time at Edinburgh Leisure and welcome the new chief executive when they start. The council sets its budget next month, and there continue to be major pressures on our budget as has been reported in the media in the last few weeks. Again, we're continuing to work with our officials to try and find resources to avoid frontline cuts that impact on the public wherever we can.

"And I'd call on the city and our MSPs to help lobby the government. The government's final budget has not been made yet. So there's still a time for our city's MSPs and our city's residents to lobby their MSPs and ask that they stand up for the capital city and argue for a fairer funding settlement for Edinburgh."

Opposition councillors have already said publicly that it would be among their budget priorities to ensure funding for all leisure facilities in the city, and we have approached other political parties for comment.

Cllr Alex Staniforth, Edinburgh Greens, said: "Throughout this financial year I've been drawing attention to the fact that Edinburgh Leisure's funding has flatlined for years – longer than I've been a councillor.

“Against a background of high energy prices and the pressing need for Edinburgh Leisure to pay its workforce Real Living Wage that level of funding just couldn’t go on and I’m very happy to see that funding has been found to both keep services running and pay Real Living Wage next year.”

Cllr Phil Doggart said: “Any decisions affecting the operations of Edinburgh Leisure facilities are obviously for the Edinburgh Leisure board to take. However, keeping the population at all ages active is important as it has a beneficial impact on the physical and mental health of the city’s residents. It is in the broader interests of the Council to ensure Edinburgh Leisure has the funding it requires to maintain as many successful facilities as possible. Funding demands are not reducing while the settlement from Holyrood is shrinking in real terms. Consequently, there is not enough money to enable us to do everything we want to do, although I am sure the forthcoming budget will provide us with a range of options about what we do with an ever diminishing supply of funds.

“As a councillor for a ward that includes one of the threatened venues, Gracemount Leisure Centre, I am concerned with the consequences for the local population if Gracemount were to close.”

Cllr Kate Campbell told The Edinburgh Reporter: “

SNP councillor Kate Campbell said: “Shockingly it turns out this money was available all along but Labour chose to hold off, meaning staff have been paid poverty wages and putting our leisure centres at risk.

“I’m glad Labour have finally caved and all staff at Edinburgh Leisure will get the real living wage as a minimum, and our local sports facilities are no longer at risk.

“It’s just a shame that, for around 300 workers, it’s taken months of pressure from the SNP and trade unions to get here.”

The council was unable to force the organisation which runs all the city's council-owned sports venues to pay the increased wage as Edinburgh Leisure is a company limited by guarantee. Rather than shareholders the company has members – of which five are councillors who are also board directors with duties to act in the best interests of the company. And any additional funds required to pay the increased salaries would always have had to be paid by Edinburgh Leisure's funder which is the council.

The report which contains the proposed funding solution will be considered by the Finance & Resources Committee on Thursday.

[The papers and how to watch online are here.](#)

There are several meetings in February when the draft budget proposals from all political groups will be discussed and the final version will be approved on 22 February by a meeting of the full council.

