

Edinburgh Leisure boss says no venues planned for closure

Chief Executive of Edinburgh Leisure June Peebles has said that figures apparently leaked to the Local Democracy Reporting Service were taken out of context and she confirms that no venues are marked for closure.

Ms Peebles, who has more than a quarter of a century of service at the organisation which runs sports facilities for the council, spoke to The Edinburgh Reporter on Thursday evening and explained that articles published about possible closures were misleading. She has written to all staff this evening to explain the position and to allay any fears resulting from the earlier articles suggesting that venues would be closed.



The Local Democracy Reporting Service provided all service users (such as The Edinburgh Reporter) with an article earlier today which contained the suggestion that eight venues were listed for closure, but Ms Peebles says this is untrue.

The Edinburgh Leisure boss said that a presentation which she had prepared for a board meeting last December, which should have remained confidential, was somehow released, and the information has been used out of context. Ms Peebles said that she imagines the Chair of Edinburgh Leisure, Scott Haldane, will investigate the matter further. [Members of the board](#) include councillors and others, and there is a PR protocol binding on all board members that any contact with the press must be referred to the PR department of Edinburgh Leisure or to Ms Peebles.

The purpose of the presentation slide from which information was taken was to predict the worst case scenario if the council – which is Edinburgh Leisure’s main funder – was unable to support the Arms Length External Organisation (ALEO) to a sufficient financial level.

Ms Peebles said: "This information is a part of a slide from a presentation which I gave to the board, and as anyone knows, you talk to a slide and put something else around it. It was intended to demonstrate the magnitude of decimating services, but closing venues isn't the answer.

"We identified in a report which went to the Policy and Sustainability Committee just this week that if we closed six venues it would realise £1 million, but it was very much illustrative and worst case scenario planning. But even at the committee councillors raised the matter of the ensuing costs if venues were transferred back to the council who would then have to pay rates etc."

In this week's report Edinburgh Leisure's financial position was laid before the council who have called upon the charity to resume paying the Real Living Wage to their employees. Edinburgh Leisure have a budgeted deficit of £0.736 million and say they cannot afford the increase in expenditure at this time. If they had to pay the Real Living Wage then the forecast is that the deficit would rise to £3.6 million in 2024/25. In the report which was authored by the Director of Place, the possibility of reducing opening hours or closing venues was described as "complex", and the resultant net benefit to Edinburgh Leisure and the Council uncertain.

In particular the report states: "Venue closure net benefits to Edinburgh Leisure and the Council are not certain.

The net position for each venue varies. Whilst closure would remove this pressure, new financial burdens would include staff redundancy costs, non-domestic rate charges, security, and disposal expenses. As an example, to realise a saving in the region of £1m would require the closure of approximately six wet / dry sport centres.

The £1m saving is before any direct costs connected with closing a venue (as detailed earlier) are considered."

The memo sent to all staff on Thursday states:

- "...some of the reporting is misleading, specifically the references to venue closures. The position is as follows: information was prepared for the Edinburgh Leisure Board to illustrate the extent of the closures to venues and services to address the estimated funding gap in 2024/25.
- For example the Board were informed that closing / handing back all the pitches to the Council would save approximately £1m however this figure does not include the cost of closure and the costs that would transfer to the Council.
- "There are currently no plans to close venues, rather I (and the Strategic Leadership Team) continue to work with colleagues at the Council as to how, together, we address the 2024/25 funding challenges.
- "There is no denying next year's funding challenges are significant and, understandably, this situation will be unsettling and worrying for many of you. Please be assured I will continue to update you on next year's budget and ongoing discussions with the Council and do contact me with your questions and/or any points for clarification.
- "June Peebles"

The Edinburgh Reporter has asked the Local Democracy Reporting Service for comment.

The council sets its budget in February.