

Contract terms agreed for Edinburgh's winter festivals

The council have agreed to award the contract for Christmas and Hogmanay for the next three years to Unique Assembly Limited (UA), the consortium which has produced the winter entertainment in the capital for the last couple of years.

The contract covers the production and delivery of Edinburgh's Christmas for 2024/25 and then for Edinburgh's Christmas and Hogmanay festivals until 2026/27, with the opportunity for two optional twelve-month extensions.

The delivery of Edinburgh's Hogmanay for 2024/25 was already agreed in June 2022 and will also be undertaken by Unique Assembly. Two bids were received by the council.

The way the new Christmas contract will work is that UA will pay to "rent" the space in the city centre which could mean they pay anything between £405,000 and £1.5million over the three years, whereas the Hogmanay contract will be paid for out of the council's revenue budget.

Council Leader Cammy Day said: "I'd like to congratulate Unique Assembly following today's unanimous decision by councillors. They bring decades of experience in delivering major events, including our own Winter Festivals, and I'm

confident that they'll provide a fantastic service to the city over the next three years.

"The festivals occupy a central element in the cultural calendar of our city and delivering them well for our residents and visitors remains a key priority for us – not least given the huge enjoyment they bring each year. They also deliver substantial economic benefit for the city and for Scotland more widely, supporting jobs and businesses in many sectors most notably tourism, hospitality, and leisure."

Due to earlier difficulties with these contracts when a previous contract partner stepped back without notice. There are many "lessons learned" referred to in the council report identified in 2022 when UA stepped in to "save" the Christmas festival.

These lessons have governed the competitive bidding procedure to ensure for example there is opportunity for clarification after initial bids are submitted, and that there are clearer instructions in regard to "securing permissions". A separate producer, Underbelly, had failed to obtain planning permission for the events in Princes Street Gardens for at least two years.

There are also more stringent regulations which the producer will have to comply with in regard to sustainability and environment. For example council officers confirmed that rules around Tree Protection Zones have been updated and made much clearer. Waste must be reduced with no single use plastics allowed.

In addition, financial assessments of those bidding for the contract were checked by officers in the finance and legal teams, and UA will pay any workers the Real Living Wage.

Councillors were also assured that the All Party Oversight Group will receive regular updates, something which was lacking and noted during the failure of the 2022 Christmas

contract.

The Christmas festival will run for four to six weeks from mid November and Hogmanay for at least three days at the end of each year.

The procurement for the contract has been conducted by council officers through what the council calls the Light Touch procedure with procurement costs of up to £35,000 incurred.

It was evident during the meeting that a decision had to be made today to allow for contracts and procurement to follow as it gets “extremely tight in reality” according to the Executive Director of Place, Paul Lawrence

Some of the discussion about specifics, including the threat of a legal challenge by another bidder, followed on the B Agenda behind closed doors and without any press or members of the public present.

Hogmanay will be funded from the council revenue budget – as before the maximum budget available for each year is £812,456.

Some 8,614 individuals replied to a public consultation (which we think is a record) conducted to find out what locals really want from the winter festivals.

This new contract will run from 27 May 2024 until 26 May 2029 with two options to extend after the three years has elapsed.



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