

Visitor Levy Bill passed at Holyrood – Edinburgh is first in queue

The City of Edinburgh Council Leader Cammy Day has welcomed the decision of The Scottish Parliament to pass the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill on Tuesday.

Paving the way for a visitor levy for Edinburgh, the Bill will give Edinburgh Council, and all other Scottish local authorities, the power if they wish to use it, to introduce a levy as a percentage rate of the accommodation cost for overnight stays.

The [Visitor Levy \(Scotland\) Bill](#) enables local authorities to apply the levy with all money raised to be reinvested in services and facilities largely used by tourists and business visitors. Similar levies already apply in tourist destinations across Europe, including Amsterdam and Berlin as well as in countries outside of Europe, such as Canada.

Councils that want to introduce a visitor levy will be able to do so after they have consulted with local communities, businesses and tourism organisations.

An 18-month implementation period will then apply before any local authorities can introduce a visitor levy scheme in their area. This is to provide adequate time for councils and businesses to put in place the systems needed to collect and administer a levy.

An expert group of representatives from the tourism industry, COSLA and other partners will continue to work together to produce guidance for local authorities putting in place a visitor levy scheme.

Final amendments made by MSPs during Tuesday's Stage 3 debate at Holyrood include a requirement to establish a Visitor Levy Forum to support decision making, something which Edinburgh Council identified in its 2019 consultation, and also an exemption from levies for people in receipt of UK disability benefits.



Cllr Cammy Day Council Leader in Edinburgh

City of Edinburgh Council Leader, Cammy Day, said: "We've long campaigned to gain these powers for Edinburgh, helping us to reap the rewards of being one of the world's most popular visitor decisions and generating huge benefits to the city and our residents. So, it's a momentous day to finally see the Bill pass through Parliament.

"I remain hopeful that we'll be among the first cities to

implement a levy and, while I'm disappointed that the 18-month implementation period remains in place, I do acknowledge the additional preparation time this will provide to the hospitality sector.

"We will, of course, continue to work closely with the sector, VisitScotland and other partners to develop the scheme in the months and years ahead, ensuring we make the very best of this huge opportunity for our city.

"A small overnight charge is common practice in other major cities and destinations and the introduction of a levy will provide a sustainable funding stream that can support culture in the city and our infrastructure, to the benefit of our visitors and, crucially, the people who live here in our great capital city all year round."

Edinburgh has long held plans to introduce the charge on overnight visitor stays in the capital, using the funds raised to benefit the local area and visitor economy. Extensive engagement on the city's proposals has been carried out, and the council said [the results of the most recent council engagement exercise](#) revealed strong support from residents, visitors, and sections of industry. The Council will continue to engage with industry over the summer before publishing its suggested scheme for councillors to consider in August. This will be based on national guidance being published soon by Visit Scotland, and will be subject to ahead of further public consultation in the Autumn.

Investment Minister Tom Arthur said: "We share a vision with the tourism industry for Scotland to be a global leader in tourism and one of the most economically, environmentally and socially sustainable destinations in the world. A visitor levy can help achieve that vision by empowering councils to raise funding, if they wish to do so, that can be invested in local visitor services and activities.

“This Bill has been a clear example of partnership working between the Scottish Government, local authorities and the tourism industry, in line with the New Deal for Local Government and New Deal for Business.

“We have sought to deliver as much flexibility to local authorities as possible and to listen to businesses to make it as easy as possible for them to adopt these measures.”

Councillor Katie Hagmann, COSLA’s Resources Spokesperson, said: “I am extremely pleased that the Visitor Levy Bill has now passed through stage 3 in Parliament. With the introduction of these new Visitor Levy powers, councils across Scotland will have the ability to use a discretionary mechanism, that is firmly based on local flexibility.

“The opportunity of these new powers recognise the great diversity of Scotland’s communities, acknowledging that a one-size-fits all approach does not work. It will allow councils to respond to the needs and circumstances of both the local communities and our important visitor economies.

“The revenue raised through the introduction of visitor levy powers will be to the mutual benefit of residents, tourists and businesses. There will be opportunities for much-needed additional investment, potentially available across a range of facilities and services, from transport and culture to maintaining and improving our world-famous natural heritage and environment.

“The visitor levy is a crucial step towards greater empowerment for local government, and we will continue to progress joint work with the Scottish Government in ensuring the smooth progression of these powers into the hands of councils across Scotland.”

Scottish Green MSP and Local democracy spokesperson, Ariane Burgess, said: “A Visitor Levy might be just a small charge on individuals, but it will deliver a huge funding boost for

Scotland's local heroes up and down the country.

"It will empower local councils to make spending decisions on key areas of need in their regions, especially for the likes of affordable homes and regeneration work to support workers and communities.

"That will help create attractive jobs, stimulate local economies, ensure that the environment and climate are respected, and ensure locals have a level playing field to invest in important areas.

"It also brings us in line with many countries in Europe and across the world who have been doing this for decades to ensure that demand never outstrips the needs of those who live in our villages, towns and cities.

"This is a small change that will benefit people and places for generations to come, and just one of many policies coming to fruition now thanks to Scottish Greens."

She added: "Another important win has been our call for a levy on cruise ships which, as we have seen in recent weeks, provide an incredible challenge and opportunity to those communities on their destinations list.

"But this has to be handled properly, with appropriate legislation and a legal framework that is designed for its purpose. Trying to just somehow bolt it onto the visitor levy, as suggested by the Lib Dems for example, is just plain daft.

"It needs to be properly delivered for absolutely the maximum effect, and we as a party will continue to work constructively to make sure this other vital tool for local councils can become a reality too."

The amendments at stage 3 include:

- an exemption from paying a visitor levy for people in receipt of disability benefits from the UK or Scottish

Governments

- a power for Ministers to cap the number of nights to which a visitor levy would apply, after consultation with councils, tourism businesses and tourism organisations and after Parliamentary approval
- a requirement for any council setting up a visitor levy scheme to establish a visitor levy forum which will discuss and advise the council on matters related to a levy in its area
- a requirement for The Scottish Government to review the Visitor Levy Bill no later than three years after the date of the first scheme coming into effect



(L to R) COSLA Resources spokesperson Councillor Katie Hagmann, Investment Minister Tom Arthur MSP and Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Simon Milne, MBE.