

# **Council leader intends to press on with Taiwanese city 'friendship arrangement'**

**The leader of Edinburgh Council has indicated he intends to press on with efforts to sign a controversial 'friendship arrangement' with a Taiwanese city after the decision was hastily removed from a meeting's agenda.**

Cammy Day said he would be "happy to support" a five-year partnership with Kaohsiung despite opposition from the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Airport and the city's Chinese Consulate.

Speaking earlier this week, he explained a report on the proposal was withdrawn from the order of business for Thursday's full council session "having taken on board the views of the business community and other partners".

But at the meeting Cllr Day said the decision was taken by the chief executive due the report's "political nature," potentially breaching strict rules around what elected members can discuss in the immediate pre-election period.

The council's new chief executive Paul Lawrence told members: "The intention is for [the report] to return, I think it needs further discussion with all political parties."

Upon being challenged on the subject by the SNP opposition group, Cllr Day said: "It's a relationship that's been building up for many years, there's been no friendship agreement signed as of yet.

"The chief executive took a decision given the comments earlier with the political nature and lead up to elections that it would be taken off the agenda for this meeting and I'm confident that after further discussion with our partners across the city that report will be brought forward to council in the next month or two, and I'll be happy to support that."

The report – which is not currently publicly available to view but has been seen by the Local Democracy Reporting Service – admitted the proposed arrangement "does pose potential risks for the city's relationship with China, but that these risks are difficult to quantify with confidence".

It said organisations including the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Airport and Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce warned the move could result in sanctions on the city and reduced trade, tourism and student numbers.

Meanwhile China's representative in Edinburgh told councillors he had "grave concerns" about a "sister city agreement between Edinburgh and cities from Taiwan".

In a letter sent earlier this month consul general Zhang Biao said the Chinese government "firmly opposes" countries that have diplomatic ties with China to conduct official exchanges with Taiwan "in any form".

Mr Biao said the council signing such an arrangement "will hurt the feeling of the Chinese people and bring about serious consequences to our bilateral relations," adding: "Surely Edinburgh would benefit little but lose a lot from such action."

A draft version of the friendship arrangement said it would

be built on a “principle of mutual benefit” and seek to “strengthen commercial and innovation cooperation, enrich the cultural and artistic life of both cities”.

Cllr Day has spearheaded efforts to strengthen relations between Edinburgh and Taiwan, visiting Kaohsiung and Taipei on a Taiwanese government-funded trip last year.

Last August he secured agreement from councillors to “work towards a memorandum of understanding between Taiwan and the appropriate city partners”.

The Chinese Consul General requested a meeting with Scottish Government minister Angus Robertson, which took place on 12 June.

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “Any decision on the friendship agreement between the City of Edinburgh and the city of Kaohsiung would be for the council to make, given local authorities are independent of the Scottish Government”.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter