

Linlithgow Burgh Halls loss tops £100,000

A supposed “overspend” of £100,000 on Linlithgow’s Burgh Halls is actually the amount the venue is unlikely to make for the council this financial year.

The figure was included in 17 pages of dire financial forecasts presented to a meeting of the council Executive this week.

It prompted questions and comments from all three local councillors – and revelation that proposals for the future of the Burgh Halls would come to councillors by the turn of the year – more than six months after an initial financial report was announced in June.

The paper on the projected budget shortfall by interim director of finance Kenneth Ribbons highlighted: “An overspend of £100,000 has been forecast at Burgh Halls due to under recovery of income. This is being offset through staffing vacancies with work continuing on a long-term business plan for Burgh Halls.

“Reduced staffing costs across the service resulting from the introduction of council wide recruitment control measures and savings made as a result of the temporary cessation of nonessential supplies spending brings the overall forecast position to £100,000 below budget.”

For the SNP group Councillor Pauline Orr asked: “For

clarification, an overspend of £100,000 at the burgh halls due to under recovery of income. What is that?.

Mr Ribbons replied: "It means that it is income that has been budgeted for."

Councillor Orr said: "So are we saying that we would get X from the cafe, X from the rental and so on. So those expectations have not been met?"

He agreed.

"Are we doing anything to try and change that", asked Councillor Orr.

Greg Welsh, head of primary education, within whose remit the Burgh Halls sits, told the meeting: "Officers are currently undertaking work to look at a longer term business plan for the Burgh Halls and that is set to come before the Corporate Policy PDSP by the turn of the year."

Labour Councillor Tom Conn also questioned the overspend saying: "This is a target which is assigned and not met. If targets are increased and the previous target has not been met, are we not creating the problem?"

"If the targets are failing then it has nothing to do with the facility, it is to do with the expectation of the targets."

Mr Welsh said that the target of income generation would be addressed as part of the plan going forward.

Councillor Danny Logue asked whether someone with retail hospitality experience should be involved at the Burgh Halls as there had been when similar problems were identified at the Howden Park Centre in Livingston.

Linlithgow's Lib Dem Sally Pattle defended staff saying: "I'm going to address Councillor Logue's comments about the staff and team at Burgh Halls. I'd like to reassure him that

they really are experts at what they do. The packages they deliver really are top class particularly in the context of West Lothian.”

Councillor Pattle first called for reports on the future of the Burgh Halls in February after a projected loss of £77,000 was revealed at the venue which is marketed for weddings and gatherings.

Councillor Conn followed up with a call for reassurances that a “holistic” review of how the Burgh Halls was used be delivered.

There has also been criticism of opening hours at the building. Within Linlithgow there has been criticism that the venue is not managed or promoted properly by the council, stuck as it is into the educational services portfolio.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter