

Government and council steering a course towards cruise ship levy

Views are being sought on a new power which The Scottish Government is proposing for councils enabling them to charge a visitor tax on cruise ships visiting their local areas.

There is clearly a long way to go before any of this becomes law, and the government has opened a consultation running for the next three months, and the council is considering a report on proposals next week. This will not have the same capacity to raise funds as the visitor levy, but depending on where the charge falls (Amsterdam which is actively trying to reduce the number of cruise ships charges around €14 per passenger per night) revenue of between £1 million and £3 million could be raised.

There are no guidelines about how the funding would be spent as yet, since the legislation must pass through Holyrood first of all, but council officers point out that funds are “typically used for city infrastructure maintenance, environmental sustainability projects and local transport improvements”.

Edinburgh has several ports within reach of the capital apart from Leith, including South Queensferry, Rosyth, Newhaven and Eyemouth, and is leading on the “commissioning and development

of a Strategic Regional Cruise Management Plan (the Plan) as part of the Visitor Economy strand of the Regional Prosperity Framework". In other words all the neighbouring areas around Edinburgh will have a say in how any levy might work in the whole area rather than just one local authority area.

Council Leader, Jane Meagher said: "Large cruise ships in particular have an environmental impact and can be the cause of changes in the ecosystem in the Firth of Forth, and affect things like flood mitigation schemes for example which has consequences for the city itself."

There is a clear difference between ships which can dock alongside an electricity supply and those which have to idle their engines out in the Forth.

Although figures are yet to be confirmed, CruiseForth calculated that there were 142 cruise calls in 2024 to South Queensferry, Rosyth, Newhaven, and Leith combined, with approximately 280,000 passengers. This included 27 calls at Leith, 52 at Newhaven, 27 at Rosyth and 36 at South Queensferry. Not only have there been more ships since 2019 which had 80 cruise calls, but the ships were also carrying more passengers.

Edinburgh Council recognises that it is important to balance the revenue already raised from operational charges from the cruise ships with any adverse effect of a levy. In the cruise season last year the council raised operational charges of £239,000 from the 37 ships calling into South Queensferry. But passenger tariff fees of £7 per person were collected from 111,000 visitors travelling through Hawes Pier raising around £790,000.

[The report being considered at the Policy and Sustainability Committee next week may be read here.](#)

[The government consultation is here.](#)

Government consultation

The Scottish Government is seeking views on the practicalities of such a levy, as well as the potential market implications and effect on local economies and communities.

Analysis shows there were around 1,000 cruise ship visits to Scottish ports in 2024, bringing 1.2 million passengers – an increase of almost 400,000 per year compared with 2019.

Finance Secretary Shona Robison said: “The tourism sector is a crucially important part of the Scottish economy and cruise visits are increasing. The consultation will help to inform the Scottish Government’s decision over whether or not to bring forward legislation and it is really important that we hear from a wide variety of voices on this matter.

“Last year, we held events to hear the views of the cruise ship industry, local government, and others. We want to continue the helpful dialogue which started at those events, and explore further what a cruise ship levy could mean in a Scottish context.”

Scottish Green MSP Ariane Burgess, the party’s local government spokesperson said the introduction of a cruise ship levy will be a crucial step for our environment and for local councils.

Ms Burgess was responding to the launch of a Scottish Government consultation on the introduction of a levy, which was secured by the Scottish Greens in 2023 and announced at their party conference by co-leader Lorna Slater.

Ms Burgess said: “A levy on polluting cruise ships is an important step for our climate and for local government. It will make a big difference for port communities across Scotland, from Ullapool to Greenock, Kirkwall to Edinburgh, Stornoway to Rosyth.

“Cruise ships are one of the dirtiest and most polluting forms of travel, and it is right that we tax them.

“The tourism that these ships bring can have a lot of benefits, but we also know that it can put a lot of pressure on the local environment, infrastructure and services.

“By allowing local authorities to apply a levy they can ensure that local people are not left picking up the bill and that they see a direct benefit from visiting ships.

“We need to ensure that councils have the powers they need to raise funds and deliver change in their communities.

“That is why the Scottish Greens worked to secure a funding increase for local authorities as part of this year’s Budget and why we delivered powers for them to double council tax for second and holiday homes.”



Celebrity Cruise ship off Newhaven
Pic Peter Devlin



Forth Ports Cruise
Pic Peter Devlin