

Wedding venue is facing a projected overspend of £100,000

Staff at West Lothian's Burgh Halls have been reassured they will be part of a solution for the council owned Linlithgow wedding venue and its financial woes.

The venue is facing a projected overspend of £100,000, first highlighted in November. The figure is actually an income target which the venue didn't reach.

At this month's meeting of West Lothian's Executive councillors heard updates on dire financial forecasts as the end of the financial year looms.

Lib Dem Linlithgow councillor Sally Pattle asked: "We have a forecast overspend of £100,000 at the Burgh Halls. I know there's ongoing work. I'd like some reassurance that it's being done with the staff at the Burgh Halls?"

Alan Colquhoun, Strategic Partnerships Manager, told the meeting: "That is the case. It is being led by the head of service, supported by myself and the venue team, and supported by officers across the council."

There has been debate over the future of the Burgh Halls for almost a year. The building is marketed by the council as a wedding venue and exhibition space. It also houses a small cafe. Despite its central position in the heart of the Royal

Burgh it has struggled to meet expected income targets.

In Linlithgow critics of the council's ownership say the Burgh Halls occupies a backwater within the council's Education Services portfolio, where officers are concentrating on schools and early years learning provision. There are some in the town who believe it could be better run independent of the council as a stand-alone venue.

All three Linlithgow councillors have backed a wider review of the way the venue is managed and marketed.

When the £100,000 overspend was first revealed in November councillor Pattle defended the staff at the wedding venue, telling a meeting of the Executive at the time: "They really are experts at what they do. The packages they deliver really are top class particularly in the context of West Lothian."

Veteran Labour councillor Tom Conn, who earlier in the year had demanded education officers carry out a review of the use of the Burgh Halls with a "more holistic approach", said of the £100,000 at the November meeting: "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."

The SNP's Councillor Pauline Orr had asked what education officials were doing to address the issue.

Greg Welsh, head of primary education, within whose remit the Burgh Halls sits, told the November 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."

The report is expected to go before councillors in the coming

weeks.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter