

Wealthy Edinburgh residents could be asked to chip in to help with city projects

Wealthy Edinburgh residents could be asked to chip in more money to help with projects around the city, after councillors agreed to look into setting up a fundraising team.

The proposal brought forward by Liberal Democrat councillor Lewis Younie, who highlighted frustration at major projects aimed at improving the city for residents, often being delayed or scrapped due to a lack of funds.

And he highlighted Edinburgh's "fantastic record of philanthropy and generosity among its residents, right across the city", as he urged colleagues to support investigating the formation of a fundraising team.

Council officials have now been tasked with bringing back a report on how "a fundraising team to support specific council projects" might work, and how it could be organised.

Introducing his motion to members of the Finance and Resources Committee on Tuesday, Cllr Younie said: "I think we have a very generously minded citizenry, we have people who would want to contribute to making the city a better place to live."

Conservative councillor Phil Daggart took issue with the proposal, suggesting it could be seen as an attempt by councilors to avoid taking "hard decisions" around which

projects to fund.

In an amendment opposing the motion he warned that “the increase in costs imposed by the UK government and the on-going underfunding from the Scottish Government has left City of Edinburgh Council with difficult decisions to take.”

And he said they must “recognise that if Council has inadequate resources, elected members must take those decisions required to close the funding gap by concentrating on priority deliverables.”

“I was surprised when I read this motion,” he said. “It looks like the Lib Dems will do anything to avoid hard decisions.

“If I was a philanthropist looking to do something for the good of the city I would just go ahead and do it, rather than handing over my money to an organisation which could be seen as not massively efficient.

“There are plenty of philanthropists already around the city and it’s quite strange that we would go to try and get them to give money to this organisation, where they would then lose control of the project.

“This motion is unnecessary, it is abdicating our responsibility on this committee, and that is why we are opposing it.”

The proposal was backed by Green councillor Alex Staniforth, who said: “If you look at the statue of Adam Smith outside [the city chambers] the plaque on the back is just a list of the people who paid for the statue, which I think is what he would have wanted. But the point is, it’s a list of people.

“Very often you have a number of people who have a little bit of money to spare who would like to put it towards their community. This idea would allow us to facilitate people who want to collectively put their money towards the benefit of

the city. Crowd funding rather than a single philanthropist.

“I think this would allow people to invest in their communities and is worth supporting.”

Committee convenor Cllr Mandy Watt said she felt there was “no harm in asking” for a report on the proposal, and joked “you can never have too many statues of Adam Smith”.

After a vote councillors agreed to pass the motion 9 votes to 2. Part of Cllr Doggart’s amendment, asking that the council “recognises the role played by the private sector in supporting projects around the city for the good of all the city” was accepted.

A report on the possibility of a fundraising team is now set to be prepared for a future meeting of the committee.

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter