

Fife Council submission of 22 February 2022

PE1912/H - Funding for Council Venues

Fife Council recognises the issues raised in this petition. This response sets out the challenges faced by Fife Council in maintaining and running venues, providing essential services and local jobs.

We share the view put forward by the trade unions that the closure of sports and cultural venues, or a reduction in the services provided from these venues, will negatively impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our citizens. Cultural and leisure services are significant contributors to local and national economies and the maintenance of, and access to, these services and venues is critical to address inequality, poverty and improved educational attainment. This is particularly the case as we develop people and places approaches, and implement our plans for recovery as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic and encourage citizens back into these venues.

A planned capital investment programme has a direct improvement on the physical and mental wellbeing of local people by ensuring the provision of state-of-the-art sport, leisure, cultural and community facilities. Our capital investment programme in Fife achieves this, but is reliant on external match funding to supplement the resources available within the Council's budget. Recent investments have included an additional £7.5m for sports and leisure facilities and £3.5m for arts and culture venues across the region as well as funding from Government, **sportscotland**, and national governing bodies.

Such essential capital investment must be complemented by revenue funding to ensure the continued provision of essential services in all our venues. From this perspective, changes required to balance budgets, along with increasing demand for services, have led to a reduction in community-based provision across Fife, with many operations now running with significantly less resource than previously. In some cases, the staffing for front line service delivery is under-resourced for the scale of provision that is on offer and in demand from local people. Individual facility budgets have become stretched, and often overspent, in order to maintain service delivery requirements and meet customer expectations.

Pressure on revenue budgets has impacted on service delivery, including the closure of some services and a reduction in the operation of others in terms of hours, days, and weeks per annum. It is therefore challenging to provide the flexibility needed to respond to emerging community needs within our facilities, particularly service provision outside core operational periods. Additional costs have to be borne by service users through increased prices, and becomes prohibitive for some of our most vulnerable users.

Fife Council operates many large venues and facilities, often in old or ageing buildings. Energy costs are already high and current increases in prices will significantly impact on budgets and the financial viability of buildings and services. Fife Council continues to proactively review opportunities to enhance existing, or create new facilities, both directly managed/operated and in partnership with our arm's length external organisations (ALEOS) and community groups in order to minimise revenue costs. It is important that venues remain cost efficient and fit-for-purpose. Area and place-based programming, as well as community asset modelling, allow us to consider the options for streamlining budgets and protecting frontline services; and while this identifies some buildings for closure, many are also earmarked for refurbishment and co-location opportunities.

Fife Council has a resourced, structured, and ongoing programme of maintenance and upgrade for the existing portfolio of sports, leisure, cultural and community facilities. This aims to ensure that buildings continue to meet demand, while maintaining DDA and other health and safety requirements. However, the lack of capacity in revenue budgets, despite careful management, can lead to spaces within venues being closed for periods due to the lack of funding for essential repairs and maintenance. Additional revenue funding would combat the need for these short-term closures or reductions in services.

The loss of income over the past two years has meant that the repair and maintenance backlog for existing buildings and venues is increasing, with an inability to always provide pro-active maintenance across our estate. The result is a negative impact on the functionality of some venues, the viability of assets, their visual appearance, and therefore appeal, as well as on the ability to meet customer expectations and needs.

In addition, Councils have to make difficult funding decisions based on both national and local priorities, such as addressing climate change, tackling the growing prevalence of flooding and, of course, the impact of covid lockdowns. Funding having to be diverted to other priorities can lead to some communities being better served than others and a need for additional revenue funding to bring venues to a point where they provide a fit-for-purpose, modern service reflecting the needs and demands of local expectations.

For these reasons, Fife Council urges the Scottish Government to provide the necessary additional revenue to local Councils to effectively run essential services and venues locally.