

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00, Thursday, 6 December 2018

The Management of Presentation Seats in Public Parks, Gardens, and Streets

Item number	7.8
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	None

Executive Summary

Individuals and organisations have donated Presentation Seats to the City of Edinburgh for nearly seventy years. These seats can be found throughout the city's public parks, gardens, streets and other outdoor spaces.

Due to budget savings over the last decade and consequent reductions to the number of staff available to maintain the seats, the Council is no longer able to sustain the current maintenance specification for its wooden Presentation Seats.

This report details the scale of the issue and proposes changes to the maintenance programme for existing and future Presentation Seat donations.

The Management of Presentation Seats in Public Parks, Gardens, and Streets

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the revised maintenance programme and specification for refurbishment of the Council's Presentation Seats, as outlined in paragraph 3.8, and proposals for a broader donation programme be approved.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has accepted donations of public seats with personalised inscription plaques in its parks, gardens, streets, and other outdoor locations since the 1950s. These are referred to as Presentation Seats. Initially, organisations donated seats to commemorate specific occasions and dates. Since then, organisations and members of the public have donated seats to the city in remembrance of loved ones, to mark significant events, or to commemorate visits to the city.
- 2.2 There are currently two models offered, a hardwood timber seat for a donation of £3,738 and a black galvanised metal seat for £1,869. The siting of these seats is co-ordinated by the Parks, Greenspace & Cemeteries Service in consultation with Locality officers, and the model of seat is dictated by the specific location.
- 2.3 Until 2010 the seats were, in effect, maintained in perpetuity. However, due to the increasing numbers of seats requiring maintenance and repair, at its meeting of 9 February 2010 the Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee approved a reduction in the Council's maintenance liability to a maximum period of 20 years and an increase in the purchase price. This resulted in a reduction in the number of wooden seats being donated and an increase in the easier to maintain metal variety. In 2017 six wooden seats and 27 metal seats were donated to the City.
- 2.4 Seats that are no longer considered economically viable to maintain are de-commissioned. Where possible the donors are contacted and given the option of funding a new replacement seat. When contact with the donor fails, or when they do not wish to replace the seat, the plaques are removed and stored and can be returned to the donors. The Parks, Greenspace & Cemeteries Service currently holds 354 such plaques in storage.

3. Main report

- 3.1 There are currently 1,552 Presentation Seats within Edinburgh's public parks, gardens, and other outdoor spaces; 1202 are wooden and 350 are metal. These are condition-assessed every 2-3 years; the last survey being completed in summer 2017. The condition of these seats varies, as detailed in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Increases to the donation fee over recent years has meant that wooden seat donations have declined and those for metal seat donations increased. Appendix 2 lists donations over the past ten years.
- 3.3 Charges for seats include a sum intended to cover the maintenance burden. However, there is no current mechanism to allow the ring fencing of monies specifically to maintain the seats over their lifetime. Income raised goes towards the general revenue budget.
- 3.4 Seats that require refurbishment are serviced by the Council's Fleet & Workshop service to a high-standard specification. However, because of successive budget savings and staffing reductions, the timescale required to refurbish a seat has lengthened significantly; especially for wooden seats, which, due to the demands of regular sanding and varnishing, are far costlier to maintain to a good condition than metal seats. Consequently, there are a significant and increasing number of wooden Presentation Seats across the city in poor structural and aesthetic condition.
- 3.5 It is estimated that the average cost of refurbishing a wooden seat is approximately £475, and a seat over a lifetime of 20 years will require refurbishment 3-6 times. Details of maintenance figures and projected costs are shown in Appendix 1.
- 3.6 Alternative maintenance options for the wooden seats have been explored. However, none have proved sustainable. Other organisations have either volunteered or been approached by the Council to trial whether seats could be refurbished externally, e.g. via Community Pay Back, charities, prison workshops, Friends of Parks groups. These projects have proved unsuccessful due to the onerous specification demands, health and safety issues, storage and equipment requirements.
- 3.7 The wooden seats are made from teak which is an extremely durable hardwood. If left unvarnished natural teak will gradually weather to silver grey over a period of 6 – 9 months.
- 3.8 It is therefore proposed that the approach to the management and maintenance of wooden Presentation Seats be updated, as follows:
 - 3.8.1 It is suggested that the wooden seats are divided into three categories:
 - Those donated over 20 years ago (775 seats)**
 - 3.8.1.1 Donors will be contacted when their seat requires refurbishment and offered the opportunity to purchase a metal seat as a replacement. Where we are unable to contact the donor, the seat will be removed and stored for 12 months. In the event of the donor not responding

within this period the plaque will be removed, stored and the seat de-commissioned. A range of ideas of how to display these plaques are currently being investigated.

Those donated within the past 20 years (373 seats)

- 3.8.1.2 The Council will refurbish these seats to a new specification standard, repairing any structural faults and sanding them back to their natural state. Varnishing will be discontinued to reduce the maintenance burden. This will result in the seats becoming more “weathered” or “silvered” in appearance (images of seats treated in this way are shown in Appendix 3). Once over twenty years of age donors will be contacted when their seat requires refurbishment and offered the opportunity to purchase a metal seat as a replacement.
- 3.8.1.3 The only exceptions to this will be in two of the Council’s botanic gardens, Princes Street Gardens and Saughton Gardens, and in the City Chambers Quadrangle, where seats will continue to be maintained to the current standard. Once over twenty-years old donors will be contacted when their seat requires refurbishment and offered the opportunity to purchase a wooden seat as a replacement.

Future donations

- 3.8.1.4 Apart from the three sites stated above, the option of donating a wooden seat will be discontinued, only the metal seat will be available (for image see Appendix 4).
- 3.9 Additional donor opportunities have or are currently being developed for those wishing to commemorate loved ones, specific occasions, or significant dates by means other than a Presentation Seat. There will be a range of options that will incorporate products at different price points, making a commemorative donation more affordable for everyone. These options will include:

Commemorative Trees/ Edinburgh Tree Dedication Products

- 3.10 A partnership between the City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust and the Woodland Trust will allow members of the public to pay for the planting of a tree, selecting from a range of different trees of varied sizes. There will also be an opportunity to sponsor an existing tree or to donate to general tree planting in the city. The long-term goal of this programme is to offer citizens an affordable commemoration or celebration option, which will also help finance new tree planting across Edinburgh. For example:

Adopt a Tree

- 3.11 A selection of trees will be offered in a range of locations (streets, parks, cemeteries and woodlands). However, a donor could select any tree owned by the Council. A plaque would be placed on the tree, a certificate issued and details of the donation recorded in a Celebration Journal.

Plant a Tree

3.11.1 Various species of trees, from whips to more mature specimens, will be offered in a variety of sites (parks, streets and other green spaces) and at a variety of prices. Donation of the younger, smaller trees will be recorded in the Celebration Journal and for the more mature variety a plaque, certificate and record will be available. Final details are currently being developed in anticipation of a launch early next year.

Donation for tree planting

3.11.2 Donations will be sought to support an annual tree planting and establishment programme.

Defibrillators

- 3.12 Working with St. John Scotland, the Council will liaise with individuals wishing to donate defibrillator equipment to a specific park or sports area. The equipment will be purchased by the Council, St. John Scotland will then install it and carry out the monthly maintenance checks at no cost. There will be no profit to the Council and administration costs will be covered by reclaiming the VAT. St John Scotland has been running a programme of installation of defibrillators for two years, and in that time 120 units have been installed, only one having been stolen (it was handed in to the Police the same day). The batteries in defibrillator units require changing every five years (which would be undertaken by St. John Scotland) and the unit itself has an approximate lifetime of fifteen years. This information will be made clear to each donor.
- 3.13 This scheme will initially be promoted through the City of Edinburgh Council and St. John Scotland websites, social media and via community groups. We aim to launch the pilot scheme early in 2019.
- 3.14 Each defibrillator installed would have a presentation and unveiling with the donor. St. John Scotland are currently planning to host a “donor stories” page on their website, a QR code displayed on the equipment will allow members of the public to read about the person and their story.

Additional equipment for parks

- 3.15 A range of products to enhance parks, such as play equipment, cycle racks, interpretation boards and wildlife boxes are also being considered. The Parks, Greenspace & Cemeteries Service will work on behalf of the Council to liaise with donors on an individual basis to identify meaningful additions to particular sites. These donations will be recognised in a variety of ways in agreement with the donors.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 The Presentation Seats in Edinburgh are well maintained and fit for purpose.
- 4.2 The financial burden for maintaining Presentation Seats is reduced.
- 4.3 A greater number of donation options are available for commemoration and support of public parks, green spaces, and other outdoor locations.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 It costs approximately £475 to restore a wooden Presentation Seat and £150 to restore a metal model. The wooden seats require restoration every 3-5 years, whereas the metal seats require restoration every 10-15 years. Metal seats are more easily refurbished, allowing third parties such as Community Payback, Friends of Greenspaces and other voluntary groups to undertake the work.
- 5.2 The burden of ongoing maintenance of wooden seats is an unsustainable pressure on the Place Management budget. A solution is required to reduce these costs. The recommendations outlined in this report go some way to address the financial pressure.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 For seats donated prior to the change in the Council's maintenance policy (i.e. prior to 2010) the letter confirming the donation of the seat to the City of Edinburgh may be construed as a contract, and as such, any breach in this agreement could be viewed as a potential risk.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 Seating is an asset to the city's parks, green spaces and streets. The health benefits of open spaces are well known and understood. Presentation Seats provide the opportunity to sit and enjoy the outdoors; especially for those who have mobility difficulties.
- 7.2 The ability to offer the customer a different range of products at different price points makes the programme far more accessible to all customers and removes any financial barriers that may have been experienced in the past.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 There is no significant sustainability impact arising as a result of these proposals, although it is anticipated that more trees will be planted as a result of introducing tree sponsorship opportunities.

9. Consultation and engagement

None.

10. Background reading/external references

None.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: David Jamieson, Parks, Greenspace & Cemeteries

E-mail: david.jamieson@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 7055

11. Appendices

Appendix 1	Presentation Seat Statistics
Appendix 2	Historical Donation of Presentation Seats
Appendix 3	Images of Traditional and Proposed Presentation Seat Appearance
Appendix 4	Black Metal Seat Offered

Presentation Seat Statistics

Income Generated

Year	Wooden Seats Donated	Donation Value	Total Donations	Actual cost to CEC	Balance remaining for maintenance
2018	3	£3,738	£11,214	£2,847 (£949 per seat and plaque)	£8,367
2017	6	£3,560	£21,360	£7,500	£13,860
2016	4	£3,500	£14,000	£5,000	£9,000
Year	Metal Seats Donated	Donation Value	Total Donations	Actual cost to CEC	Balance remaining for maintenance
2018	20	£1,869	£37,380	£15,200 (£760 per seat and plaque)	£22,180
2017	27	£1,780	£48,060	£29,700	£18,360
2016	24	£1,710	£41,040	£26,400	£14,640
Total Maintenance Balance for 2016 & 2017					£55,860

Cost of Maintenance of Wooden Seats 2016 & 2017

Seats Maintained (Wooden)		Approximate cost based on £475 per seat
2018	94	£44,650
2017	135	£64,125
2016	105	£49,875
Total spent over 2 years		£158,650

Decommissioned Seats

Wooden Seats Decommissioned January 2018 – October 2018	27
Metal Seats Decommissioned January 2018 – October 2018	0
Wooden Seats Decommissioned January 2016 – December 2017	27
Metal Seats Decommissioned January 2016 – December 2017	0

Condition and Maintenance Requirements using current specification

Wooden Seats	Urgent	Desirable	Total	Approximate cost based on £475 per seat
Structural Repairs Required	17	76	93	£44,175
Refurbishment Required	17	703	720	£342,000
Metal Seats	Urgent	Desirable	Total	Approximate cost based on £150 per seat
Structural Repairs Required	0	1	1	£150
Refurbishment Required	2	159	161	£24,150

Historical Donation of Presentation Seats

Year	Wooden	Cost to Donor	Metal	Cost to donor
2018	3	£3,738	20	£1,869
2017	6	£3,560	27	£1,780
2016	4	£3,500	24	£1,710
2015	4	£3,300	16	£1,550
2014	1	£3,100	18	£1,500
2013	2	£3,000	26	£1,500
2012	3	£2,750	15	£1,500
2011	4	£2,750	7	£1,500
2010	5	£1,500	14	£1,000
2009	9	£1,100	29	£850
2008	14	£1,100	15	£850

Traditional Varnished



Proposed specification appearance



Black Metal Seat Offered

