

The City of Edinburgh Council

10.00am, Thursday, 22 June 2023

Impact of charging for visitor access to St Giles' Cathedral

Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The City of Edinburgh Council is asked to note this update on the possible impacts of charging for non-worshippers to enter St Giles' Cathedral.

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Report

Impact of charging for visitor access to St Giles' Cathedral

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 As requested by the Council on 16 March 2023, this report sets out the possible impacts of charges for non-worshipping visitors to St Giles' Cathedral.

3. Background

- 3.1 On [16 March 2023](#), the Council considered a report on charging for visitor access to St Giles' Cathedral and agreed the following actions:
- 3.1.1 To authorise the Kirk Session, through The Church of Scotland General Trustees, to vary the title deed provisions to allow charging for non-worshipping entry to the St Giles' Cathedral;
 - 3.1.2 To agree to a Members Briefing on the potential charges for visitors; the implications for entry for worshippers and for Edinburgh residents who had the right to gain access under the Edinburgh Burgh Church's Scheme and how the definition of worshippers would be determined;
 - 3.1.3 To request that the Kirk of Session maintain free access for accompanying paid and unpaid carers to St Giles when varying the title deed provisions to allow charging for non-worshipping entry to the building;
 - 3.1.4 To request that this facility be fully advertised to the public ahead of their visit and understood by staff ahead of introducing the charge;
 - 3.1.5 To recognise that St Giles was a major city centre asset for the City of Edinburgh, and that the Council was a body "having or claiming to have rights or duties in connection with the said Cathedral Church of St Giles";
 - 3.1.6 To therefore, request a report by the next Full Council detailing the possible impact on charging for non-worshipping access on:
 - 3.1.6.1 Free and low-cost access to activities;
 - 3.1.6.2 Public access to warm and welcoming spaces; and
 - 3.1.6.3 Public access to toilet facilities; and

- 3.1.7 To ask officers to engage with the relevant body of the Kirk Session to discuss alternative models including selective charging and footfall monitoring.
- 3.2 Edinburgh High Kirk (St Giles' Cathedral), built in the 14th Century, is a key asset in the Old Town of Edinburgh. The Kirk Session has relied heavily on voluntary donations, mainly from visitors and tourists, to assist with the upkeep and maintenance of the building. However, the Covid-19 pandemic caused the reduction in voluntary donations in 2020 and 2021. Additionally, there has been a rise in listed ecclesiastical buildings insurance. The effect of this is that, in the absence of having the ability to levy a charge for entry into the building, the Kirk Session is increasingly unable to adequately maintain the fabric of the building.
- 3.3 The Kirk Session has sought the authorisation of the Council, as agreed on 16 March 202, to vary the title deed provisions to allow charging for non worshipping entry to the St Giles' Cathedral. The Kirk Session have sought to secure the necessary permissions in advance of beginning any detailed planning on the how this would be implemented. The Kirk Session have noted the requests of the Council from 16 March 2023 and have provided an update, which has been circulated as a Members Briefing (as requested).
- 3.4 The Briefing Note requested at paragraph 3.1.2 has recently been circulated to Elected Members.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The remainder of this report relates to the actions agreed, as set out in paragraph 3.1.6 above, on the impact of charging for non-worshipping access.
- Free and low-cost access to activities**
- 4.2 There are a number of free and low-cost activities available to residents of and visitors to the city.
- 4.3 These activities include access to all parks and openspaces (including but not limited to the Royal Mile, Princes Street Gardens, Calton Hill, Holyrood Park, and the Royal Botanic Gardens).
- 4.4 On the Royal Mile free access is also provided to the Museum of Childhood, the Museum of Edinburgh, the Writers' Museum and People's Story. Within a short distance there is also free access to the City Art Centre, the National Museum of Scotland, the National Galleries on the Mound and its other locations, as well as Central Library and the National Library of Scotland. The majority of these have accessible toilets.
- 4.5 The Kirk Session of St Giles' Cathedral have intimated that, although they have not yet completed detailed planning on the likely charges, they have initially planned for a charge of around £6.00 per visitor. This is significantly less than the cost of many of the major city centre attractions and the charges levied by English Cathedrals.

Public access to warm and welcoming spaces

- 4.6 The Council and partners have worked closely together to develop information for the public on warm and welcoming spaces across the city.
- 4.7 As well as highlighting the spaces available, this [website](#) also provides an interactive map of places and details of the activities which are taking place across the city each week.
- 4.8 While St Giles' Cathedral may provide a warm and welcoming place for residents and visitors in the city centre, it is not one of the [places of worship](#) which is actively participating in the warm and welcoming spaces activities around the city.

Public access to toilet facilities

- 4.9 There are a number of public toilets open across the city, which are free to access for residents and visitors. Details of the facilities owned and maintained by the Council can be found on the Council [website](#).
- 4.10 This includes a number of toilets within a short distance of St Giles' Cathedral, including on Castle Hill, Castle Terrace and in Princes Street Gardens.
- 4.11 On [22 April 2021](#), the Council approved a strategy for the future provision of public conveniences in the city. The approved approach, which initially focuses on premier parks, hopes to improve access to public conveniences in premier parks and higher footfall locations and in town centres.
- 4.12 In addition, the Council approved investment in parks and greenspaces for financial year 2023/24. A report to Culture and Communities Committee on 11 May 2023 outlined plans to utilise some of this investment to improve accessibility, particularly for public toilets in the Meadows, Inverleith Park and Leith Links.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Kirk Session of St Giles' Cathedral have committed to keeping the Chief Executive updated on progress on the implementation of plans to introduce charging for non-worshipping visitors to the Cathedral.
- 5.2 The Council will continue to support the warm and welcoming spaces initiative across the city and to invest in public conveniences (in line with the approved strategy for future provision of public conveniences).

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no additional financial impacts arising from this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 In developing proposals for warm and welcoming spaces and for the provision of public conveniences, the Council has engaged with key stakeholders, local residents and partners.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 None.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.