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Tourist Tax to Cut Deep into Charity Funds

EDINBURGH City Council's plans for a new tourist tax are set to rob tens of thousands of pounds from charity each year.

A city organisation is calling on the council to stop in its tracks as it moves to implement a £2 a night bed tax for overnight visitors as it will take £40,000 that would go towards saving lives each year.

Surgeons Quarter manages Edinburgh's largest independent hotel, Ten Hill Place. As the commercial arm of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd), it puts all its profits back into advancing surgical standards worldwide and continually improving patient outcomes.

The money that Surgeons Quarter earns through Ten Hill Place is spent on training, research and improving access to surgery across the world.

Scott Mitchell, Managing Director of Surgeons Quarter, said: "We are deeply concerned that there has been no engagement with us from City of Edinburgh Council or the Scottish Government, despite making it clear in responses to both consultations that we wished to engage to explain our concerns and look at alternatives.

"To put the £40,000 into perspective, we have recently pledged to raise £50,000 for Bowel Cancer UK to help fund Scotland's first ever research chair focused on surgical research.

"Bowel cancer is Scotland's second biggest cancer killer, but it shouldn't be as it's treatable and curable. Surgery is the most common treatment and is central to curing the disease, yet investment in surgical research is sorely lacking.

"The council will be taking money that is going towards saving lives. It is refusing to recognise the disastrous consequences of the tax – not just for Surgeons Quarter, but for the hospitality industry, too."

Surgeons frequently travel to Edinburgh to deliver training, attend and deliver conferences and sit exams on campus.

Those who are undertaking work on behalf of the College are accommodated in Ten Hill Place Hotel.

Scott added: "These surgeons' connection with Edinburgh and the College has nothing to do with tourism - and is of great benefit to the city and the global population.

"We are now going to be in the bizarre situation that we have to apply a tax on our own members for staying in their own hotel, whilst they give up their time free of charge to further College core activities.

“The College does cover the cost of travel and subsistence and will therefore now have to absorb the cost of this tax.

“We ask our hotel guests to make a donation at the hotel, these efforts will be compromised as we will also have to collect this extra tax from them.”

Business rates in Edinburgh have increased by up to 250% for hotels in the last three years, and the industry is already subject to more tax than most other industries with government-imposed liquor license expenses, VAT, NIC, PAYE and food waste charges.

Scott added: “Unlike the council, we can’t simply ask for more money from other sectors if we’re struggling to manage the money that we have – we have to earn it.

“The city is biting the hand that feeds it with these plans, and we are urging council representatives to come forward and talk to us about how we can avoid damaging our best performing industry and our purpose.

“I will write to all City of Edinburgh Councillors this week, Edinburgh MSPs and MPs urging common sense to prevail and inviting all to engage with us.”

Surgeons Quarter is looking for public backing as it approaches the council again for a full discussion on how the tourist tax would affect its role in supporting the RCSEd and is encouraging the public to get involved in the next round of Scottish Government consultation.

Donations towards Surgeons Quarter’s important Bowel Cancer UK fundraising can be made here: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/team1505>

The RCSEd has members in 102 countries. The base of the College is Edinburgh as it is the home of surgery.

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Issued on behalf of Surgeons Quarter by Holyrood Partnership, for more information contact 0131 561 2234 or catriona@holyroodpr.co.uk

Notes to Editors

About Ten Hill Place:

Ten Hill Place Hotel is owned by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and all profits go back into training surgeons worldwide.

This innovative Edinburgh hotel is within easy walking distance of Princes Street, the historic Old Town and the city centre’s main tourist, shopping and business districts; yet peacefully situated away from the main thoroughfares. The best of Edinburgh opens up before you right outside our front door.

The Festival Theatre is across the road, the National Museums are around the corner and the Royal Mile, Edinburgh Castle, and Holyrood Palace are in very close proximity.