



Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers Media Coverage 2024

- This is a compendium of all media coverage secured by the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers in 2024.
- It only contains links to those articles which specifically mention the ASSC.
- Clippings are only provided for those articles which are generally not available online, such as for the *Scottish Daily Mail*, but please note that other publications may carry a piece both online and in print.
- The full text of any paywalled online article can be provided upon request, as well as any relevant print edition clippings.
- This list does not include every radio and TV appearance from the ASSC CEO due to weblinks expiring.

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Short-term lets provide big boost

New figures claim that self-catering is worth more than £30 million to Dumfries and Galloway's economy.

And in the process, the industry supports more than 1,000 jobs across the region.

Consultants BIGGAR Economics have looked at the impact of the short-term let (STL) sector across Scotland, with people running such a property now needing to have an operating licence.

They found that STLs helped generate more than £850 million gross value added (GVA) for the Scottish economy in 2023, supporting nearly 30,000 jobs.

Dumfries and Galloway's share of that was a £31.8 million GVA and 1,079 jobs.

The report also claims that 2.1 per cent of properties in Dumfries and Galloway are STLs, while empty homes make up 4.2 per cent of the housing stock.

And BIGGAR say the annual GVA with an owner-occupier/private rented household in the region is £10,948 – compared to £20,192 for a two-bedroom STL.

Graeme Blackett, Director of BIGGAR Economics, said: "This report shows that secondary lets make an important contribution to Scottish tourism and economy overall, supporting almost 30,000 Scottish jobs. Our research also concluded that it was clear that secondary lets are not a driver of the wider Scottish housing market.

"If short-term let regulations leads to a reduction in the supply of secondary lets, that will have a negative impact on the tourism economy, without delivering any solutions to Scotland's wider housing challenges."

Figures released in October showed there had been more than 1,600 applications in Dumfries and Galloway for a short-term let licence.

But the council's communities committee had previously been told there were around 2,300 short-term lets in Dumfries and Galloway, meaning there could potentially be around 700 properties being let without the required licence.

Operators had until the start of October last year to apply for a licence or face a fine of as much as £2,500.

CEO of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, Fiona Campbell, said: "This is yet more compelling evidence that short-term lets aren't the main contributor of the housing crisis but are instead turbo-charging local economies. We can see this in Dumfries and Galloway where STLs generate £32m per annum and support 1,079 local jobs.

"However, the windfall created by STLs is at risk from heavy-handed regulation. Dumfries and Galloway Council should take heed of the report's findings when considering their approach to planning policies and control areas to ensure the relatively small number of valuable short-term lets are protected. Moreover, STLs don't impact the housing market with such properties being far outnumbered by the large amount of economically inactive empty homes and second homes in the area.

"For policy-makers, the message couldn't be clearer: you can't solve a housing crisis by producing a crisis in Scottish tourism by decimating local businesses that underpin local economies.

"Attention must shift to the real causes of the housing crisis."

Cont@cts

Editor
 ■ Linzi Watson
linzi.watson@stirlingobserver.co.uk

Deputy Editor
 ■ Jenny Foulds
jenny.foulds@stirlingobserver.co.uk
 07747 472 865

Reporters
 ■ Kaiya Marjoribanks
kaiya.marjoribanks@stirlingobserver.co.uk
 07747 750 384

■ Chris Marzella
chris.marzella@stirlingobserver.co.uk
 07720 496 508

■ Stuart McFarlane
stuart.mcfarlane@stirlingobserver.co.uk
 07818 451 689

Observer Newsdesk
news@stirlingobserver.co.uk

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Artist The striking mural on the wall of Monument Dance Centre's base in Causewayhead was created by artist David Crossley

Artist's striking new painting

Causewayhead has been lit up by a striking new mural from a local artist on the wall of a dance centre.

The mural is located on the exterior of the Monument Dance Centre in Stirling, providing a colourful depiction of some of the wildlife seen in the area - including robins, butterflies and bees.

It has been created by artist David Crossley, with the dance centre's owner already describing a surge of interest from locals and attendees about the new installation.

To celebrate the completion of the work, Monument have arranged a day of music, magic and treats for all the family this Saturday (December 14).

MDC owner Louise Murray said: "David has been working on the wall for the past couple of months.

"It's an extraordinary work of art - it's huge, colourful, breath-takingly beautiful and absolutely brightens up this corner of the village.

"It has attracted lots of attention from pupils and parents at MDC and local residents of both Causewayhead and Cornton as they pass along the road at the railway crossing."

Group call for caution over tourist tax plans

Trade body say Stirling Council must 'tread carefully'

BY CHRIS MARZELLA

A Scottish trade association for self-caterers has warned Stirling Council to 'tread carefully' over proposals to introduce a 'tourist tax' from 2027.

The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC) says that the introduction of a visitor levy scheme on tourists in Stirling would mean that small businesses could become 'de-facto unpaid tax collectors'.

Plans to explore potentially introducing the levy in Stirling was approved by councillors at a full meeting of Stirling Council on Thursday.

Work will now be undertaken over the next year following the decision and the council says that the introduction of a levy scheme would see a set percentage charge on overnight accommodation paid by visitors and tourists to the city.

ASSC chief executive, Fiona Campbell says that the implementation of the tax must 'be done right'.

"We have seen that short-term let licensing has been far from plain sailing and the same affected small businesses now look set to become de-facto unpaid tax collectors. The accumulative regulatory impact could cripple businesses at a time when recovery is precarious.

"However, it is not just operators or overseas visitors who will be impacted but ordinary Scots choosing to visit Stirling will be hit in the pocket too.

"Tourism is an important part of Stirling's economy, with short-term lets generating nearly £30million GVA, supporting 960 jobs, according to a new analysis by BIGGAR Economics. It is therefore imperative that we see



Tourism Stirling Castle with snow covered Stuc a'Chroin and Ben Vorlich rising above the historic city of Stirling. Picture by Katieless Arrowsmith/SWNS

a full economic impact assessment to accompany the proposals.

"Overall, any levy must be set fairly, have good governance and thoughtful implementation at its core, and monies raised ringfenced for tourist infrastructure only. Failure to take these steps could result in a levy that erodes the very industry it is supposedly intended to support."

A consultation will now be undertaken with residents, local traders, tourism operators and other key stakeholders - including Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. The results of the consultation will then inform a draft scheme that sets out the levy's objectives, timeline, percentage rates and how

revenues would be re-invested.

It will be presented in the autumn, with a further report to be brought to the council in December 2025 that will seek to approve or dismiss its introduction in Stirling.

If the levy is given the go ahead, it would be subject to a minimum 18-month period of implementation between its announcement and the scheme coming into effect, meaning that the earliest that it could be introduced would be in June 2027.

The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 was passed by the Scottish Parliament in May this year and is also being considered by a number of local authorities in Scotland, including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Argyll and

Bute and Highland Council.

Following the approval for exploratory investigations into bringing in the levy, Stirling Council deputy leader, Cllr Gerry McCarvey, said: "Tourism is one of the most important sectors in the Stirling economy. We are still at the early stages, but we are committed to exploring the potential of the visitor levy scheme and this will involve full public consultation with residents, businesses and visitors throughout 2025."

It's estimated the introduction of a one-per cent visitor levy could generate between £1.5million-£2.3million annually. A five per cent visitor levy could generate up to £7.5million.

How 'Airbnb' crackdown could cost £57m a year

A CRACKDOWN on Airbnb and other short-term lets will cost Scotland's capital city £57million a year in lost revenue, according to a new report.

The Biggar Economics consultancy highlighted that short-term lets accommodation in Edinburgh is estimated to generate £154million for the economy and support 5,580 jobs.

It said city properties used solely as holiday lets only account for 1.5 per cent of dwellings, with secondary lets making up just 0.8 per cent.

Its report found a 0.5 per cent reduction, caused by the crackdown, in the share of properties accounted for by short-term lets would lead to a loss in economic

'Guest spending supports jobs'

activity of £57million. Graeme Blackett, director of Biggar Economics, said: 'This independent research has found that the economic impacts of short-term lets will tend to be greater than residential use - this is a result of guest spending in the local economy.'

'The guest spending supports jobs in the Edinburgh economy, as well as sustaining a greater range of hospitality and other local businesses than would otherwise be the case, contributing to the quality of life for residents.'

'The short-term lets sector is contributing at least £154 million to the Edinburgh economy each year. Our research also found that short-term let properties account for only 1.5 per cent of Edinburgh's housing

By **Michael Blackley**
Scottish Political Editor

stock, with secondary lets at only 0.8 per cent, too low a proportion to have a meaningful impact on the local housing market.'

A new short-term lets licensing scheme was introduced by SNP ministers last year but sparked an immediate backlash.

The report, commissioned by the Justice for Scotland's Self-Catering campaign group and STL Solutions, also found that empty properties far exceed the proportion of short-term lets, and account for 4 per cent of properties.

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, said: 'This major research study verifies that secondary lets are a huge economic driver for the capital, supporting over 5,500 jobs, and providing a much-needed boost to other local tourism and hospitality businesses.'

'For us, the message is clear: you can't solve a housing crisis by producing a crisis in Scottish tourism by decimating local businesses.'

'Instead, we've got to build our way out and tackle the increasing problem of empty homes.'

City of Edinburgh Council leader Cammy Day said the report looks at short-term lets 'through a very narrow lens' and it was 'important to retain residential properties as homes for citizens to live in as part of local communities contributing to all sectors of the economy, not just the hospitality industry'.

A Scottish Government spokesman said: 'The purpose of the licensing scheme is to ensure the safety of guests and safeguard the reputation of Scotland as a quality tourist destination.'

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economy

up it's currently in

tion. But unless there is consistent pressure from the of government, backsliding aversion are inevitable. ask is to ensure that we are ntly ahead of our tors not on some, not on half l of the necessary policy we are to attract sufficient private investment.

the chancellor has got the gnosis right. We are in a h doom loop and the way ansform ourselves into a tment economy through d well-judged reform. e on offer is to be the most onomy in Europe, y Brexit but not t, still the most attractive arket for private and tal, in which investment e and in every part of the the heart of our growth ery crisis there is Now is the time for our about the face and to turn o a different course



Tourism tax could kill goose that lays the golden eggs

Fiona Campbell

As we head towards the Scottish budget, one proposal to plug the fiscal gap is devolving powers to councils to set cruise ship levies. Eyes might widen within cash-strapped town halls at the prospect of more revenue, much as they are with upcoming visitor levies.

Throughout these discussions, we must never lose sight of the crucial role tourism plays in sustaining local economies. It is undoubtedly a force for good, contributing £6 billion annually and providing 229,000 jobs, yet the media narrative is anything but. Concerns about "overtourism" tend to predominate and how we must therefore tax and further

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Gathering is a global attraction

Spectators from around the world descended on Kirkmichael to enjoy the 141st Strathardie Highland Gathering.

The family-friendly event was held in changeable weather conditions in Bannerfield on Saturday, August 24.

The traditional accompanying agricultural show made a welcome return this year and Rowan Dempster (6) is pictured with Highland calf Angus.

• See inside for four pages of pictures by Angus Findlay.

'COMMON SENSE HAS PREVAILED'

SHORT-TERM LETS DECISION IS WELCOMED

Councillors vote against control area plan

KATHRYN ANDERSON

Campaigners have welcomed a move by councillors to vote against establishing a short-term let control area in Highland Perthshire and north-eastern Perthshire.

Elected members on Perth and Kinross Council's economy and infrastructure committee rejected the recommendation by eight votes to seven.

Those who voted against said they did not believe it would create more affordable housing, while those in support argued it

was just "one tool in the toolkit".

It would have been Scotland's third short-term let control area, following on from the entire Edinburgh City Council area and Highland Council's Badenoch and Strathspey ward.

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the Association of

Scotland's Self-Caterers, said:

"We are pleased that common sense has prevailed.

"Short-term lets cannot continue to be used as a convenient scapegoat for much wider housing challenges."

● FULL STORY: PAGE 4

No to control zone for short-term lets

Narrow rejection of planning permission proposal

KATHRYN ANDERSON

Perth and Kinross councillors have voted against establishing a short-term let control area in Highland Perthshire and North Eastern Perthshire.

Elected members on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee rejected the recommendation by eight votes to seven.

Those who voted against said they did not believe it would create more affordable housing while those in support argued it was just "one tool in the toolkit".

On Wednesday, August 28 councillors were asked to approve beginning the formal statutory process to introduce a short-term let control area in Highland Perthshire and the northern half of Eastern Perthshire.

It would have been Scotland's third short-term let control area, following on from the entire Edinburgh City Council area and Highland Council's Badenoch and Strathspey ward.

Creating a control area means planning permission is needed for a domestic property to change in use to become a short-term let.

Highland Perthshire and North Eastern Perthshire have a higher concentration of short-term lets than the rest of Perth and Kinross - nine per cent of housing in Highland



Vote The meeting voted against a short-term let control area

Perthshire and 13 per cent in North Eastern Perthshire.

While 76 per cent of residents and 57 per cent of organisations were supportive of the principle, 69 per cent of businesses were opposed.

Presenting the recommendation to the committee PKC's strategic lead for economy, development and planning David Littlejohn said creating a control area would "ensure that in the future when housing is provided, that there's proper consideration given before the owners of those properties opt to buy them for the purposes of short-term lets".

Independent councillor Colin Stewart asked what evidence there was it would help the housing shortage.

Mr Littlejohn responded: "This is one of a number of measures to manage local housing supply. On its own it's not going to deliver a ramped

up number of houses coming back on the market."

He added: "It might influence the choices of some second home owners as to whether or not they can afford to have a second home if they feel they have to apply for planning permission and have it refused."

"This is about the future and how we manage future housing stock to the best of our ability but it's never going to be the only tool in the toolkit."

Other measures taken by Perth and Kinross Council have been to implement a 100 per cent council tax increase on second homes and the Empty Homes Initiative which aims to bring empty properties back into use.

Moving the proposal for approval convener Eric Drysdale said it would provide "the introduction of stronger, clearer, planning controls to manage the number of

new short-term lets across Highland, northern Strathay and the northern part of Blairgowrie and Glenswards".

Cllr Drysdale said the shortage of affordable housing was negatively affecting the tourism industry.

The SNP councillor said: "In some parts of our area the proportion of the overall housing stock given over to short-term lets is of concern. This impacts not only on the recruitment and retention of key workers but on the tourism sector itself where lack of accommodation is constraining the operation of some businesses."

The motion was supported by SNP councillors and Labour's Alasdair Bailey.

Highland Perthshire councillor John Duff - whose ward would have been in the control area - seconded the amendment. He believed limiting short-term lets would not resolve the issue of residents on low incomes being unable to afford high house prices.

The Conservative councillor said: "In the Highland ward area, average wages are nine per cent below the Scottish average. The data states that 59 per cent are unable to afford market entry housing and 85 per cent are unable to afford average house prices. Highland has the second highest inward migration levels. Yet it has the lowest rate of house

completions at three per cent and the most limited effective land supply at six per cent."

"We also hear that social housing is affordable to 85 per cent of households and yet only 13 per cent of housing stock is social housing."

"Quite clearly, what is needed is more social housing. Residential properties coming out of tourist accommodation into residential accommodation will not fill that gap."

After the meeting, Baillie McLaren said: "To create a control zone will not solve the affordable housing needs within the proposed area. What is required is focused action to identify solutions for this to be addressed, not a policy that tinkers around the edges."

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, said: "We are pleased that common sense has prevailed. The plans did not strike the appropriate regulatory balance and would have led to the closure of many small businesses - hitting the local economy in the process - without achieving the apparent policy objectives."

"Short-term lets cannot continue to be used as a convenient scapegoat for much wider housing challenges. Closing down small businesses in Perth and Kinross would not lead to a glut of affordable homes as today's vote recognised."

Rental firms slam SNP for breaking its OWN rules over sofa-surfing plea

SHORT-TERM let operators have accused the SNP of hypocrisy for encouraging MSPs to provide spare beds for sofa-surfing Westminster staff.

The party has issued an 'urgent plea' for temporary accommodation so London-based staff can campaign in Scotland ahead of the General Election.

It led to a backlash from operators who have to carry out numerous safety checks and apply for a licence before they can let out their properties.

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC), said: 'It would be rank hypocrisy if those responsible for short-term

Daily Mail Reporter

let licensing did not fully adhere to the rules.' Those thinking about sharing their property should know that a licence 'and possibly planning permission' would be needed, she said.

'Self-catering operators have jumped through numerous hoops to comply and there simply cannot be one rule for some and another rule for others.'

An agenda for Tuesday's meeting of the SNP parliamentary group stated: 'Urgent plea for anyone who can provide accommodation (spare room or flat) to staffers from Westminster for

six weeks - please tell Angharad asap.' The ASSC claims that 1,000 self-catering homes have shut down since the SNP government introduced controversial local authority licensing regulations in October.

Concerns have also been raised that MSPs would be breaking Holyrood rules if they let out Edinburgh accommodation they pay for through the parliamentary expenses system.

The SNP declined to comment yesterday when asked if it is confident that MSPs offering a room or property without a short-term lets licence would not be breaching the rules.

By **Michael Blackley**
Scottish Political Editor

AT LEAST 1,000 self-catering homes have stopped operating since a licensing scheme was introduced last year, industry leaders have claimed.

The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC) raised concerns about the major impact of the scheme – and has likened the only response from SNP ministers to moving chairs around while the Titanic sinks.

It comes as SNP ministers are set to hold a series of events designed to focus on efforts to boost the economy.

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the ASSC, told the BBC's The Sunday Show: 'What we are seeing is quite contrary to business growth and all of that good positivity that we all want. We are

'Contrary to business growth'

seeing businesses shutting, leaving the sector, daily.

'We've already lost a minimum of 1,000 self-catering units on non-domestic rates since the legislation came in.'

She added: 'We have given the Scottish Government a very easy, very clear solution. But what they've done by laying the legislation last week is they've essentially moved the chairs around on the Titanic whilst it is sinking.'

1,000 holiday rentals shut down due to SNP short-term lets chaos

The government last week introduced regulations in parliament adapting elements of the short-term lets licensing scheme.

Changes included allowing licences to be transferred to a new host if a property is sold and allowing those developing new buildings to apply for a provisional licence before the construction work is completed.

Local authority licensing schemes opened for applications in October 2022, and hosts and owners had to apply for a licence by October 1, 2023, in order to be allowed to continue to operate.

After introducing the updates to the legislation, housing minister Paul McLennan insisted the government has 'continually engaged with operators and the wider tourism industry' on the scheme. He said: 'If passed by the Scottish parliament, the regula-

tions will support new businesses through the timely transfer of licences between operators and the consideration of new short-term lets at an earlier stage of their development.

'This will ensure that the licensing scheme continues to deliver quality and safety assurance for

'Moved chairs on the Titanic'

guests, whilst protecting the needs of local communities.'

Kate Forbes, the Deputy First Minister and Economy Secretary, will today announce a package of support for start-up high-growth businesses.

It will be the first in a series of events related to the economy this week. Speaking ahead of a

visit to the National Robotarium in Edinburgh, the UK's centre for Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, Ms Forbes said: 'Supporting business founders is critical for a vibrant, dynamic and growing economy.'

'By empowering start-ups, we are creating a successful economy built on entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainable growth. Backing the rise of a new generation of Scottish firms will generate new wealth as they export their products and services.'

'My clear message to investors is that Scotland is open for business. Our entrepreneurs have the talent, ideas and creativity to develop and expand hugely successful businesses, and the Scottish Government stands squarely behind the start-up community, and will continue to help them succeed.'



Lost business: Fiona Campbell

Desperate home buyers 'gambling' as ultra-long mortgages go from niche to the norm

Business Voices - Page 22

HOME TRUTHS
Kriszy Dorsey and
Scott Wright in our
Business section

'The new planning policy is not driving the release of land for development in Scotland'

Barrat's Scottish chief calls for action to boost housebuilding - Page 24

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Tourism body warns sector facing 'irreversible damage'

Bosses call for new licensing scheme to be reviewed

Exclusive
Kathleen Nutt
Political Correspondent

A MAJOR tourism body has warned a "fundamental" review of a scheme requiring holiday accommodation suppliers to have a licence must be carried out, otherwise the sector will face "irreversible damage".

The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC) made the demand after the new First Minister John Swinney pledged to dedicate every "filter of his being" into growing the economy, while his deputy Kate Forbes promised to cut red tape.

Under regulations which came into force last October, anyone who operates short-term lets (STL) has to have a licence or face a ban and fine of up to £2,500.

The changes were brought in to help tackle problems with housing demand and anti-social behaviour, especially in STL hot spots such as Edinburgh.

But critics say the legislation is flawed, and a threat to Scotland's tourism sector and wider economy. Responding to comments made by Mr Swinney and Ms Forbes, Fiona Campbell, CEO of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, said the regulations were damaging businesses in the sector and putting Scotland at a competitive disadvantage.

"Any pledge to reduce the regulatory burden on business is not worth the paper it is written on if it does not include a fundamental reconsideration of the flawed short-term let regulation, which continues to pose significant problems for small businesses throughout the country," she said.

"Sadly, the current approach places Scotland at a competitive disadvantage and will push up costs for those wishing to visit our country. "We are an outlier, not just in terms of the UK with our disproportionate approach, but the EU too, with the latter having implications for any aspirations to repair through the need for alignment."

She added: "The current status quo cannot endure, with plunging levels of business confidence. According to a recent survey by the ASSC, just 54% intend to stay in business

Sarwar in candidates row



Andrew Learmonth
Political Correspondent

ANAS Sarwar has defended Scottish Labour's candidate selection after criticism from the SNP over a number of activists from England being chosen to fight seats north of the Border. The party's pick in Angus and Perthshire Glens is Elizabeth Carr Ellis, a councillor from Canterbury, in Kent. Labour's

Continued on Page 4

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar and deputy leader Dame Jackie Baillie at the Donald Dewar statue after speaking at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Picture: Andrew Milligan/PA Wire

beyond 2024 as a self-catering operator. "It doesn't have to be like this, as government and industry working together in lockstep can produce better public policy. We hope that the change of leadership at the top can provide a much-needed reset in relations and instil a genuine and meaningful New Deal for Business with demonstrable action, not just words. "Industry has made it abundantly clear it wants to be regulated in a fair, balanced and legally sound

manner. As such, we have presented mutually beneficial solutions to resolve the outstanding challenges. "Legislation should be amended to clarify the relationship between planning and licensing, and guidance should be amended on the subject. Minor or superficial tinkering won't cut it. The time to act is now, otherwise more jobs and livelihoods will be lost and irreversible damage inflicted on a crucial sector for Scottish tourism." She continued: "There is a real opportunity for John Swinney and

Kate Forbes to turn the page and work with business to put things right so Scotland's £1 billion self-catering industry can get back to doing what they do best in providing unrivalled hospitality."

A spokeswoman for the ASSC added: "In an ideal world, it would be repealed, with a more proportionate regulatory framework taking its place, with the introduction of a registration scheme with mandatory health and safety criteria.

"Failing that, the Scottish

Government could amend their Licensing Order to clarify the relationship between planning and licensing, as this would significantly anchorate the scheme."

The STL regulations introduced last year require all bed and breakfasts, homes rented out on platforms such as Airbnb and the short-term renting out of spare rooms to have a licence.

Although the new STL law applies nationwide, licences are managed

Continued on Page 2

Colleges' change of life policy for female employees

Exclusive
Garrett Stell

A NEW national policy will provide added benefits and improve working conditions for college employees to feel "stronger and more empowered" during menopause.

The policy results from a joint agreement between Colleges Employers Scotland (CES) and trade unions Unite, Unison, GMB and EIS Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA).

The policy builds on menopause accommodation work already in place at colleges nationwide. Edinburgh, Dundee and Angus, Glasgow Clyde, and UHI North, West and Hebrides colleges already offer home or hybrid working staff options.

Staff can take extended breaks at Forth Valley, Glasgow Kelvin, and North East Scotland (NESCOL) colleges. Edinburgh College offers extra time to complete tasks and trains all managers in menopause-related support.

Other benefits include access to temperature-controlled workspaces, desk fans, and various mental health and support services, such as Menopause Champions at NESCOL and Glasgow Clyde or voluntary support groups at UHI Moray.

Staff have said the national policy represents a major step towards increasing

Continued on Page 2

Kevin McKenna
Why do our political class hate the Men's Shed movement so much?



Page 15

Executive's £80k course row

AN executive at Scotland's water industry regulator said a government official knew she was being sent on an £80,000 Harvard business course.

In a letter released yesterday but sent last month to the Public Audit Committee, the firm's chief operating officer Michelle Ashford said the Scottish Government had been made aware of the Harvard Business School (HBS) course she had been sent on, which cost £77,350, including

flights and accommodation. "The sponsor team at Scottish Government were aware that I was participating in the HBS programme," she wrote.

The spending was discovered along with other payments - including a £400 high-end restaurant dinner and £100 gift cards for staff as Christmas presents - by Audit Scotland.

Full Story: Page 5



Michelle Ashford

Police investigate 'missing ashes'

POLICE have launched a probe into a former funeral directors' company amid claims of missing ashes.

Forensics officers were seen going into a branch of A Milne Funeral Directors in Springburn, Glasgow, after several families reported allegations of ashes going missing, and financial misconduct.

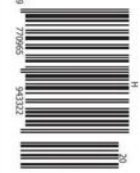
The firm also had a branch in Dumbarton, West Dunbartonshire, which has since closed.

A Police Scotland spokesperson said: "An investigation is ongoing into the conduct of a former funeral company that had branches in Glasgow and Dumbarton with regard to the storage/return of cremated remains and allegations of financial misconduct."

"Inquiries are at an early stage."

A post on Facebook announced the

Continued on Page 5



Exclusive inside The Herald today:

This Mental Health Awareness Week, Shepherd and Wedderburn discuss some of the challenges of being a company director.



By **Craig McDonald**

It was used to provide emergency housing for Ukrainians fleeing the horror of war in their homeland.

Now the cruise ship MS Ambition is making an unlikely return to Scotland – to host tourists and performers at the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe amid an accommodation crisis sparked by the SNP's new rental licences.

The 25-year-old vessel was hired by the Scottish Government in 2022 to house more than 1,000 Ukrainian refugees and remained docked in Glasgow until last year.

The 700ft ship will return and berth at Leith in August, with the MS Ambition temporarily renamed the Playbill Fringeship after the US theatre magazine which is hiring it for the duration of the event.

We told last week how Edinburgh's festivals face an accommodation crisis after the new short-term lets (STL) licensing scheme

Cruise liner used to house refugees sails in to ease Festival's flat letting shambles

'Facing an all too predictable accommodation crisis in city'

SNP's flawed law sparks 'desperate measures'

led to a 90 per cent reduction in rental spots in the city. The law that came into effect late last year makes it mandatory for all short-term rental properties, from a castle to a spare bedroom, to have complicated and costly licences to legally operate.

Critics said the impending arrival of the ship is another example of the negative impact of the SNP's licences on Scotland's lucrative tourism sector.

It's understood council officials are even assessing whether the ship may require one of the STL licences while berthed in Leith. Cabins cost £1,250 for seven nights or £179 for an overnight stay, with a suite starting at £3,550. Playbill said it hoped the venture would help the city deal with a drop in the number of 'festival flats' due to the curbs on short-term letting.

It added: 'We will sponsor exclusive performances for guests of the ship only, bringing acclaimed talent directly from the festival on board.'

With three months to go to the Edinburgh Festivals, the city council has so far only issued around 1,200 STL licences, in stark contrast to the 12,000 lets previously estimated to be available.

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, said: 'Edinburgh is facing an all too predictable accommodation crisis for this Festival, and perhaps beyond, unless action is taken.'

'Despite the addition of a cruise ship, there's a local solution already available – and that is to allow the remaining professional self-catering businesses to continue operating.'

Stars such as TV presenter Gail Porter and comedian

Fringe flats crisis thanks to SNP's red tape (and it's no joke)

FLAT FARCE: Last week's MoS story as Jason Manford hit out

Jason Manford have recently hit out at the eye-watering cost of staying in Edinburgh during the Festivals as a result of the reduced supply.

The Scottish Mail on Sunday has repeatedly highlighted the issue with concerns first raised two years ago over the impact the licensing law would have on the Festivals, which

are worth more than £400 million to Scotland's economy.

Tory MSP Miles Briggs said: 'Festival-goers and performers provide such a boost to the economy and should not have to rely on accommodation like this ship to stay in the capital.'

'Humza Yousaf needs to urgently address these issues

'Policy has resulted in a housing emergency'

otherwise more visitors and performers will be forced to go to desperate measures to secure accommodation in the coming months.

'The SNP's double whammy of cuts to the housing budget and their flawed STL policy has resulted in a housing emergency in Edinburgh.'

This month, the local council announced 'temporary exemptions' for some STL licences were being introduced in an attempt to avert the crisis.

Operating without a licence is a criminal offence which carries a penalty of £2,500.

The Scottish Government said the scheme was introduced 'to ensure all short-term lets are safe'. Responsibility for the implementation of the licences falls to each of Scotland's 32 local authorities.

Edinburgh City Council planning convener James Dalgleish said: 'It's important to strike the right balance between promoting our visitor economy while looking after residents.'

'We declared a housing emergency last year due to our chronic shortage of affordable homes and the STL control area is already returning unauthorised short-term lets back to their residential use.'



EMERGENCY ACTION: MS Ambition during its stay in Glasgow where it housed refugees



FLAMING MESS: Festival performers are being priced out of eating

Fringe flats crisis thanks to SNP's red tape (and it's no joke)

EDINBURGH'S famous festivals face an accommodation crisis hitting tourists and performers – after the SNP's new licensing scheme saw a staggering 90 per cent reduction in rental spots in the city.

It's now mandatory for all short-term rental properties to have complicated and costly licences.

But, with only three months until the Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe, the city's council has issued just 1,200 Short Term Let (STL) licences – in stark contrast to 12,000 STLs previously estimated to operate in the capital.

Prices have soared due to the drastic cut in accommodation. The council has also granted just over 100

'City risks becoming a laughing stock'

'full-time secondary let' licences, largely to professional self-catering businesses, as vast numbers of properties exit the sector.

Industry body the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC) said many former locations have given up due to the significant costs, running into thousands of pounds, of obtaining a licence.

Concerns over the impact on the festivals, which are worth more than £400 million to Scotland's economy, were first raised two years ago.

Last week City of Edinburgh Council announced 'temporary exemptions' for some STL licences in a bid to avert the crisis.

Voicing her concern, TV personal-

By **Craig McDonald**

ity Gail Porter said on social media this month: 'Was so excited to go the Edinburgh Fringe this year.'

'But I have been priced out by the soaring costs of B&Bs. My home town. I feel so sorry for new young performers that won't be able to afford accommodation.'

Top comedian Jason Manford posted: 'Edinburgh Festival prices especially for accommodation are an absolute joke.'

'No idea how anyone starting out is managing to get up there and showcase their talents. I priced a week up there and even if every show sells out, I'm still operating at a loss.'

Fiona Campbell, chief executive of the ASSC, said: 'A world-leading festival city should be more than able to accommodate comedians, yet it risks becoming a laughing stock. It's a predictable mess. We consistently highlighted the dire consequences. These forewarnings are now becoming glaringly apparent.'

Operating without an STL licence is a criminal offence, with a penalty of £2,500 and a one-year ban from applying for a licence.

Conservative housing spokesman Miles Briggs said: 'If the Nationalists double down on this flawed policy, then the impact on businesses will be hugely damaging.' The Scottish Government said the licences were 'to ensure all short-term lets are safe'.

City of Edinburgh Council's planning convener James Dalgleish said: 'It's important to strike the right balance between promoting our visitor economy while looking after our residents who live here all year round.'

SNP tourist tax gets green light (but it won't apply to motorhomes)

A PLANNED tourist tax has been backed by MSPs, despite concerns it could 'cripple' businesses.

Legislation giving councils powers to impose a 'visitor levy' on overnight stays yesterday passed its first hurdle at Holyrood.

Ministers announced that motorhomes will not be included, despite demands from areas affected by wild camping.

The general principles of the legislation were approved by 86 votes to 30, with only the Conservatives voting against it.

But, coming only months after a new licensing system was introduced for short-term lets, the plan triggered a backlash from business

'Now is not the right time'

leaders amid concerns over the impact on the vital tourism sector.

Fiona Campbell of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers said: 'With the visitor levy proposals the Scottish Government must ensure history does not repeat itself with the disastrous experience of short-term let licensing.'

'The regulatory cumulative impact could cripple businesses at a time when recovery is precarious and we should be supporting them for a sustainable and prosperous future.'

'Price sensitive consumers may switch to holiday in York instead of Edinburgh, or the Lake District instead of the Highlands, hitting local economies and communities.'

'These proposals may add more risk and uncertainty to a sector where the domestic market makes

By **Jessica North**

up 70 per cent of those holidaying in Scotland.'

She added: 'Given the challenging circumstances for Scottish tourism - from pandemic recovery, cost of living and short-term let regulations - now is not the right time.'

Public finance minister Tom Arthur said: 'This is a new power that will enhance local government and can be an opportunity to create opportunities for significant revenue generation for investment in local tourist economies.'

He insisted that funds should not be used by local authorities to plug financial black holes.

Scottish Hospitality Group spokesman Stephen Montgomery warned that firms would be burdened with higher costs than other parts of the UK. He also demanded 'an agreement that the funds are not to be used in any way to fill a black hole in any local council's normal budgetary shortfalls'.

The legislation would give councils the power to impose a visitor levy on overnight accommodation, but does not set out any rules for the level of fee.

The City of Edinburgh Council has previously estimated that a £2 per night charge could generate around £15million a year.

MSPs will be able to propose further amendments before a final stage-three vote later this year.

Tory MSP Miles Briggs said: 'Many tourism businesses have not fully recovered from the pandemic and in recent years have had significant additional costs, thanks to this SNP-Green government.'

'Many fear this Bill, as with the botched short-term lets legislation, will lead to unintended harm.'