

**Holyrood Committee Backs Visitor Levy Bill at Stage 1**

The majority of members on the Holyrood Committee considering the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill have supported the general principles behind the legislation, which would allow Scottish local authorities to introduce an overnight accommodation levy, following extensive consultation.

Publishing its Stage 1 Report today, the Parliament’s Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee said that a majority of members of the Committee support the general principles of the Bill and a majority of members again found that it was “unlikely that the introduction of a levy in certain local authority areas, assuming a relatively modest rate, would have a deterrent effect on visitor numbers and therefore on the visitor economy in Scotland.”

Miles Briggs and Pam Gosal did not support several of the report's conclusions or the general principles behind the Bill.

A majority of members however agreed with evidence from stakeholders which suggested the introduction of a levy has “the potential to bring significant benefits to visitors, the tourism sector and local residents” whilst recognising that not all of Scotland’s local authorities are expected to introduce a levy and therefore benefit directly from the Bill.

Supporting the Bill’s provision to give local authorities the ability to choose whether to introduce a levy and how to apply it locally, a majority of members of the Committee welcome “the degree of flexibility” provided and believe that this will allow councils to “design and implement it in a way that suits local circumstances.”

The Committee also recognised business concerns around the timing of the legislation, following the impact of COVID-19 on Scotland’s tourism sector and the increased costs of doing business, as well as recent changes to short-term lets licensing.

The Report also said the Committee was “mindful of the concerns of accommodation providers that the introduction of a levy could result in an additional administrative burden” and welcomed the Bill’s requirements to implement localised monitoring and reporting to ensure transparency and accountability.

Considering if any levy should be a flat or percentage rate, the Committee considered this was “perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Bill in terms of determining what the right approach should be.” and invited the Scottish Government to undertake further work on this area of the Bill to find a suitable solution.

The majority of members of the Committee agreed that “meaningful consultation with the tourism and accommodation sector to create a genuine sense of partnership working” would “help alleviate the concerns of many in the sector” and show that a levy should bring “long-term benefits” by improving the experience of visitors to areas where a levy is applied.

The earliest date a visitor levy could be applied by local authorities is 2026, which a majority of members of the Committee considered would provide enough time for any “outstanding issues to be resolved through engagement and consultation” with businesses and other key stakeholders. However, the Committee also invited the Scottish Government to respond to suggestions from some councils that they should be able to introduce a levy sooner than 2026.

**Commenting, Committee Convener, Ariane Burgess MSP said:**

“In supporting the Visitor Levy Bill at Stage 1, a majority of the members of the Committee recognise its potential to positively impact Scotland's tourism sector.

"After thorough consultation and consideration, most members of the Committee have supported the core principles of the legislation, emphasising that a well-designed levy, at a modest rate, shouldn't discourage visitors and should bring benefits for the tourism sector.

"A majority of the members of the Committee welcomed and support the flexibility provided by the Bill, which will enable local authorities to customise the levy's implementation meaning that local levies are designed to suit local circumstances.

“Understanding concerns from businesses and being mindful of possible administrative burdens, a majority of members of the Committee believe that industry worries can be resolved through constructive engagement and consultation at the local level, ahead of any levy being introduced in 2026.

"For the majority of the members of the Committee the Visitor Levy Bill has the potential to be a positive force for the tourism sector, and thank the individuals, organisations and other stakeholders who provided evidence to inform this report.

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