

Is the Edinburgh Music School under threat of closure?

Green MSPs and councillors reacted angrily to a proposal by the council to close the City of Edinburgh Music School following the Finance & Resources Committee earlier today.



But is it under threat of closure?

In the draft budget proposals which were laid before the Finance and Resources Committee earlier today there is simply one line stating that the saving by creating a citywide Equity and Excellence Music Service would save the council £363,000 under the theme of Service Transformation.



There was a lot of comment by members of the committee that these one line themes were not helpful and needed fleshed out. The Finance Convener, Councillor Alasdair Rankin, repeatedly said that the details would come out as the consultation launched on Monday.

But following the defeat of the administration's motion based on these one line themes at today's meeting, that consultation will no longer start on Monday and it will be delayed. The budget meeting for February 2018 is already set in the diary and is the date when the council sets its budget for the next year.

It appears that someone who was privy to an internal council briefing document dated 13 October 2017 delivered a copy to the Lothians Green Party MSP Andy Wightman. You can read that on [Andy Wightman's website here](#) and it is clear that closure is very much in the minds of the council. Nothing about closure was mentioned in the papers for today's committee

meeting.

When pupils and parents of the City of Edinburgh Music School got wind of a possible closure however, they protested appropriately :

Students of the City of Edinburgh Music School protest over council budget proposals which would close the Music School
pic.twitter.com/okLHzvwndY

– Claire MacBride (@ClaireMacBride1) [October 27, 2017](#)

Mr Wightman said that while he recognises the “serious funding challenges” facing the council, he could see no sense in the proposal from an “educational point of view”.

At the committee meeting today the Finance Convener called in a council officer to speak to the matter of the music school. It appears that there are 60 pupils and it costs the council £452,000 so the cost to the council is an additional £7,500 on top of the £6,500 it costs to educate each pupil anyway.

It must be made clear that these are pupils who have real musical ability and who have passed an audition to get into the music school where they get tuition first of all in classes and then on a one to one as they progress through the school.

Conservative Councillor Iain Whyte commented at today’s meeting : “We are back to the original problem that we have a line in the report with a sum of money beside it but no detail.

“It is contradictory to say we will make savings but more children will get music tuition.” He also commented that if the instructors at the school had to travel across the city this will create issues around management of staff and their travel time. He asked : “Does this not mean more management than a single specialist facility?”



Councillor Claire Miller Green Group

Claire Miller, a Green councillor and member of the council's finance committee, says parents and pupils must have their say before any final decision.

Lothian MSP Andy Wightman said: "I am utterly opposed to this proposal. It makes no sense from an educational point of view and represents a substantial cut in music tuition across the city. I recognise that local government is facing serious funding challenges and that is why, at Holyrood, I am arguing for more resource and for greater fiscal autonomy for councils.

"Closing one of Scotland's national centres of excellence in the arts is indefensible and I will work with our team of Green councillors to do everything I can to make sure parents' and pupils' voices are heard before any decisions are taken."

Green member of Edinburgh's finance committee Cllr Claire Miller supported today's decision by the committee to delay the budget consultation by 11 days.

Councillor Miller said: "The council administration was seeking approval to consult on £21m of potential budget cuts with only a bare single line describing each cut and leaving it unclear what the actual cut was. That's close to asking opposition members to sign off a blank cheque and is no way to run public services. By delaying 11 days, the full detail can be available before the consultation is signed off."

Miller added: "It is unacceptable for families whose worlds have been turned upside by discovering overnight that their school may disappear. It is crucial that parents' and pupils' voices are heard before any decisions are taken."

So we have to ask why the apparent lack of transparency? We attended a briefing at the City Chambers earlier this week

when this was barely mentioned. Instead there was much discussion of the possible £1million savings in the Chief Executive's department by leaving vacant posts vacant, improving the way the council recover unpaid council tax and business rates, increasing the council's income by using its assets (buildings etc) better. Oh and then there was the £25 a year charge (per household) to pick up garden waste. That rather pales in comparison with this.

Given the number of parents who attended the City Chambers today to protest (even during the meeting from the public gallery) it seems that this may well be something that the council have to consider again.

And we all might have to look more carefully at the details behind the council's budget proposals, making it all the more important that we all have our say or #playyourpart when the consultation is eventually launched.

The next Finance & Resources committee meeting is on 7 November 2017 when we imagine there will be deputations from parents and pupils at the Music School. Much as there was today.

Former pupil Callum Thomson has tried quite hard on Twitter today to put forward some facts of his own about the City of Edinburgh Music School and its pupils :

Such ignorance in that doc of what CoEMS does. It's not just for Edinburgh kids! I travelled in from E Lothian, classmates from Fife and D&G

– Callum Thomson (@2lsnop) [October 27, 2017](#)

Dispersing (less) £ around Edinburgh will provide worse teaching for only local kids. And end the 'community' of musicians that is CoEMS

– Callum Thomson (@2lsnop) [October 27, 2017](#)