

Wightman plans moves on proposed closure of music school

The council is accused of wanting to close the City of Edinburgh Music School which is one of four specialist music schools in Scotland, and this weekend the story has not yet been denied by the council.



Andy Wightman MSP and his daughter Isla Ratcliff, a former pupil of the Music School

Early last week we were invited to a media briefing about the council's draft budget which was coming up for outline approval on Friday morning at the Finance & Resources Committee.

It became clear towards the end of the week that the council had perhaps not been completely transparent about its proposals to make savings in its revenue budget. It had been produced in very general terms, with figures against individual items under six general themes, all of which add up to the £20 odd million needed to balance the books.

One line in the draft budget proposal was to save £363,000 in the area of 'Creation of a Citywide Equity and Excellence Music Service'.

An internal briefing paper which came to light made it clear that the proposal really means that the council plans to close the City of Edinburgh Music School, run as part of Flora Stevenson's Primary School and Broughton High School. You can follow what has happened so far in our round-up below.

We spoke earlier today to Andy Wightman MSP who first revealed

the internal memo and his daughter, Isla Ratcliff, a former pupil of the school.

Here is what they had to say.

Andy Wightman MSP said : "Well it became evident I think on Thursday that the council was going to consider a new citywide centre of excellence in equity and music.

"What was revealed last week was that in fact this involved closing the City of Edinburgh Music School which is based in Flora Stevenson's Primary School and in Broughton High School. That information wasn't available to councillors.

"The closing of a centre of excellence is a national issue because this is one of four national centres of excellence so that is why the council has to think twice about proposals to close it.

"The national centres of excellence at Edinburgh, Dyce, Plockton and in Milngavie were established with Scottish Government funding back in 1999, and they continue to be funded by the Scottish Government.

"Therefore, if the City of Edinburgh want to make unilateral changes to the way it delivers one of the national centres of excellence it needs to consult with the Scottish Government, and there is no evidence that it has done so.

"The savings it intends making through this are not really savings because the Scottish Government will in all probability want to claw that money back if it is not used for a centre of excellence."

Mr Wightman continued : "In an internal briefing they reveal that they want to combine the £2.3million they spend on instrumental tuition across the city with the £500,000 or so spent on the City of Edinburgh Music School and then cut that combined budget by £550,000. That makes no sense. You can't

have greater equity and greater excellence by combining budgets and then cutting it.”

Meantime Mr Wightman has a topical question to put to the Scottish Government on Tuesday to ask the government what support it provides to these centres of excellence. He might be able to raise it with the Education Secretary if the question is taken. If his question is not taken then he plans to table a constituency question at First Minister’s Questions on Thursday.



Mr Wightman’s daughter Isla Ratcliff is a former pupil at the school. She has just graduated from Oxford University with a First Class Honours degree in Music and hopes to go to music college to study a masters degree. She told us what made it special to be a pupil at the school.

She said : “It’s an amazing school. It’s an amazing institution. You get about two music lessons every day. I got two hours of violin lessons a week and one hour of piano lessons a week. In third year I got one hour of singing a week as well. You’ve got academic music, ensemble classes after school and during school hours as well.

“The music school did so much for me.I did Suzuki violin from age 5 but the music school meant that my music career really took off. It’s such a great community. The teaching that you get is just incredible.”

Isla was also able to tell us about the resources that the music school has available. “This is a Steinway school. It has about fifteen Steinway pianos in it. To split it over eight centres across the city is just ridiculous. One of the reasons why the school is so valuable is the community feeling and the fact that younger pupils look up to older pupils. You can play in ensembles together.

“To split it, it would no longer be what it is.”

Here is a round up of discussion about the possible closure of the school on social media :

FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

You can watch the briefing given by one of the council's education officers on the matter of the music school at Friday's Finance and Resources Committee [here](#)

He had been asked by the Convener to urgently come to the committee when councillors began to ask for more detail on what they were deciding upon. A group of students from the Music School had set up to play in the Quad at the City Chambers to draw attention to the opposition that the council might face if the proposals proved to be true.

When questioned, the officer clearly states that there are no proposals for closure of the school. It may be of course that not everyone at the council was privy to the terms of the internal briefing, but we are assured that it is a council paper.

The council officer can be heard saying : “The proposal is to look at a way of spreading the offer to gifted and talented through the music school in each of the four localities.

“Possibly rather than have it in two settings as it is at the moment, Flora's and Broughton, it would actually be in eight settings in each locality. Possibly Flora's could be still there for the locality, Broughton High School could be the offer for the music school across the city in that particular locality.

“The advantage of this proposal is that we would be looking to prove the opportunity for more children to get access to music, to actually explore how many talented children have identified talent in music.

“We would do that by ensuring that at least 10 % more primary school children had access to instrumental music tuition. Now you might say how can you do that and at the same time take £550,000 out.

“You can do that by a combination of two things : looking at the way that the music school is managed and the costs of management, and the costs of instrumental music tuition. You

can also look at that in terms of the numbers who are in front of an instrumental music tutor in primary schools at the moment.”

This matter will perhaps come back to the Finance & Resources Committee on 7 November when they next meet, if indeed it is still one of the proposals for savings put before the committee. The Finance Convener Alasdair Rankin admitted they had many other ideas about ways of cutting the overall spend by the council, some of which had already been discounted by the administration who brought forward the draft budget framework.

The six week public budget consultation which ought to be starting tomorrow will be delayed meantime we understand.

If you are a parent of a child at the school and would like to have your say then please get in touch.

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