

# Don't put all the culture in the city centre!

*by Councillor Ashley Graczyk an Independent councillor for Sighthill/Gorgie Ward*

As another summer comes to a close, I have increasingly been made aware of the mixed views of some of my constituents in Sighthill-Gorgie towards the Edinburgh Festival. Whilst many enjoy the range of events on offer, a growing number are concerned about the impact on the city's services, citing overcrowded buses, blocked and over-trafficked streets and mushrooming AirBnB holiday lets. There is also a sense of concern that the city's limited cultural resources are concentrated on high profile city centre events in August at the expense of cultural activities in our communities the rest of the year round.

Earlier this year, I asked Edinburgh Council to investigate the distribution of public budgets by locality. This is because I became aware that not all budgets are proportionately allocated across the city and feel that we have a duty to ensure that resources are fairly and equitably distributed to bring benefits to all wards.



Cllr Ashley Graczyk

For instance, in terms of culture, I was dismayed to discover that there has been a very heavy bias towards funding large institutions headquartered in the city centre at the expense of organisations working within our communities. A massive 73% of the capital's cultural revenue funding currently goes to organisations based in the South East locality, of which 61% goes to organisations based in the City Centre ward alone.

What is worse is that these allocations have been rolled over, without competition, for a number of years. Following discussion at the Culture and Communities Committee last November, we agreed to review the process for allocating cultural revenue grants. I am pleased to say that a new application process will be implemented for 2019. This refresh is long overdue as rolling over funding allocations lacks transparency and stifles the ability of new arts organisations to flourish.

We also need to address geographical exclusion. No organisation in my ward has received cultural revenue funding in recent years. Even more worrying is that no organisation in

the whole South West locality has received any such funding, showing just how geographically imbalanced these allocations are. Whilst we are fortunate to host international arts events in our city, I believe that the pendulum has swung too far towards funding large, centrally headquartered bodies at the expense of local community groups.

I was alerted to this imbalance by research conducted by Gorgie Collective, a community arts group in my ward. As the Chair of Gorgie Collective, Katriona Gillespie, explains: "There has been a historic imbalance in the way cultural resources have been allocated in Edinburgh. We were shocked when our research showed such a heavy bias towards city centre organisations. We believe the Council has a responsibility to provide equality of access to cultural resources to communities across the whole city."

It is entirely unsurprising that this lack of resources results in cultural disengagement. The most recent Edinburgh People Survey makes for depressing reading, as my ward, Sighthill-Gorgie, is the most culturally disengaged area in the city. Young professionals in my area state that they feel that cultural resources have become even more city-centric in recent years. The huge benefits to wellbeing that culture and the arts can bring are well known. Our responsibility as councillors is to make sure we are delivering these benefits to constituents in all parts of our city.

I am glad to say that work is now underway to address this inequitable distribution. Following my motion in May, Edinburgh Council has recently published a report profiling spend across each locality. A further report, identifying opportunities to devolve certain budgets to local level, will come before the Council in October.

We also have an opportunity for increased community engagement and decision-making through the new localities committees. I hope this means that we will be able to take more decisions at

local level to reflect local needs. I will be working with my community and the South West Locality Committee to ensure that our local priorities are delivered. In my view, Edinburgh Council – and we as councillors – have a duty to ensure that cultural and other resources are fairly and equitably distributed to all communities across the city, benefiting all our citizens, the whole year round.