

Proposed cuts to Edinburgh Leisure ‘will endanger the health of vulnerable people’

Sports clubs have warned councillors that cutting £3.35m from Edinburgh Leisure’s budget will “endanger the health of vulnerable people” in the Capital.

One proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council, who have to trim their spending by between £33.1m and £41m in next year’s budget, is to cut £350,000 from Edinburgh Leisure’s £8.15m of current funding. They then propose in their draft plans to cut £1m in each of the following three financial years.

But the results of the council’s budget public consultation have revealed that there is “strong opposition to the reduction in spending on Edinburgh Leisure due to the importance of this service in meeting many of the council’s goals for physical activity, health and well-being”.

Edinburgh Leisure said it is likely the funding cuts will have “serious implications” on the “health and well-being of the city”.

The council will set its 2019/20 budget next Thursday – and now requires at least £33m of cuts to balance the books. The council received £8m more than first expected from The Scottish Government.

Colin McMillan, chairman of ClubSportEdinburgh, has called for

councillors to think again about the impact of removing funding from Edinburgh Leisure.

In a letter to councillors, Mr McMillan said: "The overall trend of reduction in payment to Edinburgh Leisure has been striking, seeing a reduction of £4.5m over 20 years.

"This additional £3.35m cut over four years will result in facility closures and therefore endangering the health of vulnerable people in communities across Edinburgh. We can't believe that the council would set a budget knowing that leisure centres would almost certainly close as a result."

Mr McMillan has also criticised the council's proposal to cut £62,000 of the £106,000 currently handed over to sport and learning activities, labelling the funding a "tiny but crucial budget".

The council says the reduction will mean the authority will "no longer provide funding which can be sources elsewhere" but has committed to maintaining the holiday activity fund.

Mr McMillan added: "The shocking and perhaps most concerning factor is the apparent disregard in which sport and physical activity is considered by parts of the council.

"The proposed action of removing a tiny but crucial budget from sport organisations delivering activities for people with a disability and in deprived communities is staggering. This funding is used by Lothian Disability Sport, Team United, an autism support programme, girls self-defence classes, over 50s football and rugby, girls football, women into netball, walking groups in Pilton to name but a few."

Edinburgh Leisure said the organisation was committed to working with the council.

An Edinburgh Leisure spokeswoman said: "Next year, 2019-20, will be challenging but our budget proposals for this year

have been working with these reductions in mind. However, the magnitude of reductions in future years, 20 to 23, is going to challenge us.

“At this point in time, it is hard to imagine that reductions of this extent relating to £1m each year from 20-21, 21-22 and 22-23, will not have serious implications on services and ultimately the health and well-being of the city.”

Council Leader, Cllr Adam McVey said that the SNP and Labour groups will be meeting early next week to examine the consultation feedback ahead of Thursday’s budget meeting.

He said: “It’s worth saying that the funding reduction for 19/20 is based on discussions we have had with Edinburgh Leisure to ensure that any reduction should not have an impact on facilities that people use.

“The discussions that we will be having are around the future years of funding which is the thing that Edinburgh Leisure are expressing more concern about.”