

Council to restrict funding for The Venchie to the end of the year

Despite Councillor Callum Laidlaw's best efforts today to get more funding for a unique club in Craigmillar which helps children get to school, the council agreed to allow it only £10,000 to last until the end of the year.

Cllr Laidlaw explained that The Venchie is a unique referred breakfast club which picks children up from their home, ensures they are properly dressed and then takes them to a safe place for breakfast before walking them to school.

It is called a 'referred' club as the children who benefit from the service are literally referred to them by social work or other agencies. These are children from 'chaotic' families – those who are perhaps struggling with addiction for example. He is worried that the children will fall through the gaps without the 'targeted highly personal care offered'. He suggested that a transfer to a universal breakfast club would not work for these children.

Only last week at the Education, Children and Families, a teacher explained to councillors the effects of children coming to school hungry. A report produced then set out stark figures showing that a total of 21,000 children in Edinburgh live in poverty and that 31% of children living in Portobello/Craigmillar live in poverty.

Cllr Laidlaw pointed out that the club required funding of

£60,000 which he likened too the cost of a play park recently approved by the council.

He said : “Given that The Venchie has done such good work in the last decade, £60,000 seems to be a small price to pay.”

Previously the club had been funded up to £160,000, and he also highlighted that the club has done a lot of fundraising. Their fundraising has met at least 50% of the running costs.

Councillor Claire Bridgman made an eloquent speech in support of continuation of funding for the club. She explained : “We pledged that we would do more for the vulnerable children in the city. Now we seem to be doing less. Every child in the city, wherever they live, deserve our full commitment to getting it right for them. I implore you to do everything in our power to support this vital project.”

The Education Convener Ian Perry lodged an amendment recognising what The Venchie does, but restricting their future funding, which at the same time he promoted as a safety net. He put in a kind of protection by asking the council to move the children to universal breakfast clubs and report on that move in October 2019.

Cllr Perry also suggested that officers ‘investigate how the Venchie, and any other Third Sector Organisation, can work in partnership to provide holiday programmes, after school provision and wider support for young people and families...’

This amendment was approved by councillors by 31 votes to 25.