

Good work goes on despite the council 'starving us of funding'

Although the council has still to decide on the allocation of Third Party grants from September onwards, they have said they will continue payments to existing grant holders until 31 August 2020.

The email which the council sent out to all applicants was not entirely clear however, and some of those whose fate will be decided in May misunderstood the message, thinking they had been overlooked.

At the March meeting of the Culture and Communities Committee the committee room was full of applicants whose requests had been rejected.

The council has now clarified that new awards to be made under the 2020-23 Communities and Families Grant Programme will start on 1 September 2020, but no decision has yet been made.

This round of funding will be decided at a committee meeting planned for May, although it could yet fall to be decided by council leaders owing to the interim arrangements during Covid-19.

During the government lockdown there is all the more need for those doing good work to keep it up.

One of those groups is The Venchie Children and Young People's Project in Craigmillar. Their request for a Third Party Grant of £100,000 was rejected last month, although it could still be under review.

During school term the project runs a very successful breakfast club. This sometimes involves going to the homes of the young people they are assisting, bringing them to their base on Niddrie Mains Terrace, and then helping them on their way to school with a good breakfast inside them.

Now it is all different, except to a degree it is much the same. There are people in Craigmillar in dire need of help, and The Venchie are there to offer that help. As a result of the council's Third Party Grants funding being in limbo, they continue to do this without any council funding.

The group gets food from charity, Cyrenians, for redistribution.

Susan Heron, Manager at the Venchie explained what they are doing each day. She said: "We are coming in daily and preparing meals. One day we prepared chicken curry and rice. That was kept in the fridge all night, and then handed out cold with instructions on how to reheat it.

"We've also been working with Social Bite giving out around 200 of their packed lunches. We have sanitary products on the bus, fruit and veg and oatcakes. We also have extra food, soup and pastas, so we're making maybe 60 of them daily.

"We give the food to children and families in the Craigmillar area, some we know and some who are new to us.

"The other week we parked up at Greendykes, and one of the workers from the care home came to get some sandwiches for the

pensioners living there.”

The staff from the Venchie and their volunteers all wear protective gear while distributing the food round the local area.

Susan continued: “We applied to the council and didn’t get anywhere with it. We’ve been put out of the mix on these third party grants. We get food from Cyrenians and for a long time now we have had some extra. As we knew we were not getting any funding from the council, we ‘stockpiled’ food. Luckily we have four freezers full of fresh and chicken and mince so that we can still help right now.

“There’s two members of staff covering the base here, and two members of staff going out in the minibus. So we are covering four bases in the area each day.

“We understand that people might not want to come out of their homes now. But if they see us and want to flag us down then we will stop and we will go and put some food at their door.

“We have been handing out flowers as well because we get the excess food from Lidl. So we’ve been inundated with flowers. We went to a pensioners’ block just across the road from us and left flowers and a packed lunch on their doorsteps, calling out to them to tell them what we’d left.”

Susan was emphatic about the message she wants to give to the council. She said: “The council is not funding us, but we are still here. We are needed in this community.

“There are 3 projects in this community who work with under twelves. Due to the fiasco with third party grants not one of these projects has been funded. So that means that there is no council provision in this area for under twelves now.

Mike Bridgman is a director of The Venchie and a former councillor. He said: “This is essential work we are doing. We applied again this year and this council appears to have no

social conscience. They are funding larger organisations and not grass roots organisations like this which should be supported. The council is starving our project of funding, but people are using the service which is vital to the community."

The Venchie are on the streets from 11 till 1pm and at the base on Niddrie Mains Terrace from 8.30 to 3pm. They would love to hear from you if you can offer them any help.

