

Council working with partner organisations on options for Film Festival and Filmhouse

At the Culture and Communities meeting on Thursday, councillors discussed the recent demise of CMI, the parent charity for the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) and Filmhouse.

Three of the political groups, Greens, SNP and Labour, had collaborated in asking for this to be discussed today as an emergency. It calls for support for the staff who have lost their jobs and for further action on finding ways that the EIFF and Filmhouse might continue in some form. In particular the council has agreed to continue to work with the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, Screen Scotland and all stakeholders "to examine all options for the future of Filmhouse and EIFF".

The Director of Place, Paul Lawrence, explained that officers are working with stakeholders to protect and support film culture, cultural cinema and the EIFF in the city and the country. He outlined: "There are positive noises and discussions taking place about the immediate future of the EIFF. Nothing certain, no guarantees but there are very positive discussions taking place around the uncertainty of the 2023 edition of the EIFF. It may be that something will be agreed in the short term although longer term it will take more time to establish. I would describe the discussions as

positive and encouraging.”

He reminded councillors that it was only just ahead of the pandemic that the EIFF and Filmhouse had put forward a bold proposal to build a new home for both in [Festival Square](#), citing the constraints of the former church where Filmhouse had operated from for years.

Mr Lawrence agreed that the council officers would report back to councillors within the bounds of what could be said within the public domain.

Joan Parr, Service Director for Culture and Wellbeing, and who joined the council last year from a senior role at Creative Scotland, added that there is a deal of goodwill and determination among the stakeholders they have spoken to about the elements which are affected – the EIFF, the Filmhouse and cultural cinema.

The council has agreed to investigate and report on the short term and longer term future of both organisations and also to establish how much funding the council has provided in the past and could provide next year.

All councillors who spoke at the committee were of one voice – that it is lamentable that EIFF and Filmhouse have been the victims of the post-Covid era, that members of staff who were summarily dismissed need help and advice, and that the council and councillors must have a role in any future iterations of the festival and in delivering cultural cinema.



Cllr Val Walker, Culture and Community Convener speaking at Dusherra on Sunday 9 October 2022 Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

The convener, Cllr Val Walker confirmed that the news of the charity's liquidation broke apparently without notice, and said that council must be kept informed on any updates both in relation to this and other cultural organisations in Edinburgh.

Cllr Amy McNeese-Mechan mentioned that film is one of the most democratic art forms we have. She said: "It brings great literature to people, pressing social events, historic events and orchestral music as we saw at the International Festival opening event a few years back. We know how important it is, and the appetite for film has not left us.

"Laying aside the challenges of the building I hope we have positive conversations to take things forward. I have been told that even a few days ahead of the announcement new staff were being hired at The Filmhouse.

"Alongside the positive moves, we want to know why we didn't have more of a heads up in this the 75th anniversary year of the longest continuing film festival in the world. Maybe salvaging the festival first and people's jobs is important but questions are being asked because public money has gone into supporting this."

Convener Val Walker assured the councillor that they did not receive any heads up or advance information, saying "and if they had then we might have been able to help". She also confirmed she was committed to sharing as much information as possible with elected members.

City centre councillor, Finlay McFarlane, said: "Our hearts go out to all the staff who must be facing such a worrying time. I feel quite angry about the situation that we are in. Just a year or so ago we were discussing what our wellbeing recovery would look like coming out of the pandemic. Unfortunately that trolley car has been completely sidelined by the economic situation we find ourselves in because of the actions being

taken down south.

“It won’t just be Filmhouse who find themselves in this position. If you are a theatre or picture house energy costs are already high. To pay staff fairly, to meet those rising staff costs is also high.

“What is the administration doing proactively about the other cultural treasures that we have in my ward – and across the city? I hope we are not just moving from crisis to crisis but that we are engaged with all cultural venues across the city to do whatever we can in the current economic climate.”

The Convener explained that the council has “good links with cultural organisations across the city”.

She said: “We hope for openness and transparency so that we know what the financial position is. Some of us are on the boards of these organisations. We really do want to know if anyone is in trouble and then find ways to help.

“It does not all come down to money. We can help with professional advice and support.”

Cllr Kate Campbell said she feels things are “incredibly precarious at the moment” but that the council has a significant role as it touches on everything including the city’s economy. She wanted to ensure that the council is taking this seriously. She said later: “The elephant in the room is that we are seeing horrendous economic mismanagement, and these things are going to be felt more broadly than in our city. I think we can’t lose sight of the fact that while the economic situation continues this will be a more frequent occurrence and not just a one off. The UK Government must understand the effect their decisions have on the ground on our industries.

The Convener said: “Immediately we heard about this the Council Leader wrote to the CEO of Creative Scotland to seek

assurances of close partnership working. We have those assurances. The first meeting is on Friday and onwards on a fortnightly basis – both the council leader and myself as Culture Convener.”

Cllr Dan Heap who proposed the motion said: “Edinburgh has an illustrious past and potentially a very bright future as a film city a scene in in Avengers End Game was filmed just about five metres behind my colleagues opposite in the courtyard.

“The shocking and unexpected collapse of CMI last week puts the promise at risk. For the time being, Edinburgh does not have a film festival and has lost one of its best loved cinemas, which should concern us all. Filmhouse had a special interest in showing films that other cinemas would not show.

“Edinburgh simply cannot **not** have a film festival.

“Friends of Filmhouse held a vigil at the cinema last night and I am sure we will want to work with them very closely over the next few months. Committee needs to keep a close eye on these matters for the next few months.”

In seconding the motion Cllr Walker said: “I was devastated when I first heard the news especially for the staff but also as someone who has frequented the Filmhouse for more than 30 years. As a single parent I went there and took pot luck on the films I saw. Just to go and see what was on opened my mind to a range of cinema from different countries and cultures. I will do anything I can to support the Filmhouse, the EIFF and cultural cinema in Edinburgh.

“I know the Council Leader is of the same view. We have taken a joint position to do anything we can. We have ring fenced the funds we were due to give the Filmhouse and we understand Creative Scotland have done the same. The first meeting will be tomorrow and I am set on finding ways to keep this committee and different political groups advised about this. I

want to share whatever is not confidential with everyone else. I hope if anyone feels they are not being kept fully in the picture they feel they can just contact me.”

The emergency motion, originally suggested by Cllr Staniforth, was unanimously approved.



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