

Community centre may be saved with council grant

A 'life-saving' Edinburgh community centre threatened with closure has been given fresh hope for the future as the council is set to award a £40,000 grant.

The five-figure sum is the exact amount which staff and service users at the Muirhouse Millennium Centre said was desperately needed to keep the lights on, during a compelling deputation to councillors less than a month ago.

Pauline Nicol-Bowie, director of Low Income Families Together (LIFT) which is based at the centre, said she was "delighted" at the news and is planning to throw a party to celebrate.

She added the funding, which councillors will be asked to approve later this week, would help tide the building over for another two years.

For over 20 years it has been a lifeline to those facing difficulties, offering support with housing, parenting, budgeting, mental health – and everything in between – whilst running activities and providing a safe space for the community.

The vital services provided were highlighted to councillors last month by staff, volunteers and local residents who visited the City Chambers in a plea for funding.

One woman said the centre saved her life after she walked through its doors homeless and suicidal four years ago.

Another warned crime rates would “go through the roof” if the council allowed it to shut.

Council funding for the centre has been gradually cut since it opened in 2000, from more than £100,000 a year to virtually nil. Certainly the centre now receives no continuous income from the local authority. Staff warned that the hub would struggle to stay open past June unless £40,000 was found to meet the building’s operational costs.

A report which will go before councillors this week said the sum could be taken from the Edinburgh Discretionary Business Support Fund.

It said: “On 9 February 2023, the council heard a deputation from Muirhouse Millennium Centre which recognised that while they are facilitating important services for people from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds and demand for services is increasing, they are facing significant financial challenges.”

The council’s Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee will be asked to approve the grant on Thursday.

Ms Nicol-Bowie, who founded LIFT and has run the charity out of the Muirhouse Millennium Centre since 2017, said alongside other donations received in response to the appeal they are well on their way to reaching their £80,000 fundraising target – the total needed to keep the centre open for another two years.

She said: “If they give us the £40,000, there’s four-and-a-half thousand on the GoFundMe, £5,400 I just got from Places for People, which is amazing – and then £1,000 that’s already been donated – so it takes us to just over £50,000. I think we’ll get the other £30,000 in the next few years.

She added: “This is really important to us – the community is delighted. We’ll be having a party.

“The staff are also delighted because it’s their jobs as well. Even though LIFT is okay we’d have to relocate and it’s not the same.

“That’ll be us until next year and with the GoFundMe page I have no qualms about us managing somehow to get the other £30,000 and that’ll be us for two years – I’ll be getting my head down now and applying to everybody and speaking to the council to how can we get a working relationship and a contract for the work LIFT do and the work the centre does.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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