

Council refuse Citadel funding request amid a “veil of secrecy”

The council has awarded only a fraction of the funding requested by one of the major youth groups in the city, and it is claimed that it has done so amid a veil of secrecy.

Citadel Youth Centre, which offers children and young people all kinds of opportunities in a safe environment has operated in Leith since 1980.

In the past the centre based on Commercial Street received £175,000 of funding from the council, but knowing there would be less funding available this year, the Citadel reduced their ask to the council from £175,000 to £100,000. They had not expected however to have their funding slashed to just £50,000 for each of the next three years when the award was announced.

The decision was made at the council’s Education Committee in December when funding for other groups was also finalised – but the exact details of all awards were not made public.

Willy Barr, who has been Manager at the Citadel for two decades, said: “In the lead up to the meeting on 18 December

when the announcement was made the committee had not published a table of grant awards as they normally do. Instead they contacted us on the Monday afternoon to inform us we had been recommended for a partial award – 50% of what we applied for.

“We had applied for the maximum capped amount of £100,000 to fund our work with children and young people. This news has come as a huge disappointment, as although we expected a cut from our current annual grant of £175,000 per year, this reduction of £125,000 has been way more than we anticipated and will now seriously impact on the services and support we offer to the local community, many of whom are already impacted by poverty and related issues affecting their mental health and well-being.”

LETTER TO THE COUNCIL LEADER

In a letter to the Council Leader Mr Barr has asked if there is any way of cushioning the blow by offering a one-off payment to allow the Citadel to transition away from the historic council funding. He will address the meeting of the Education, Children and Families Committee in a deputation on Tuesday in an effort to plead the youth group's case. [You can read the papers for the meeting and watch the proceedings online here.](#)

Mr Barr has also highlighted what he regards as a lack of transparency around the grants process. He said that there was no consultation and that the two organisations who facilitated a briefing opportunity for all applicants to attend, Lothian Association of Youth Clubs (LAYC) and Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council (EVOC), each received grants from the fund. LAYC has received £120,000 and EVOC £100,000 – when the cap on funding was said to be £100,000 per organisation. (It is clear from council papers that this funding does not form part of the £3.5million fund).

Willy said: “This veil of secrecy surrounding this committee's

business doesn't feel like an open democratic process."

In addition Mr Barr said that by the council's own admission there has been no impact assessment carried out in advance of the grant proposals being announced. Instead, he understands that any such assessments would be conducted after monies were awarded which contradicts one of the central recommendations from the Lessons Learned in previous third party grant processes. This recommended that:

"An Equalities and Rights Impact Assessment should be completed prior to the report going to Committee so that Members are able to make decisions that take account of that information and recommendations for action."

Council Leader, Cammy Day told The Edinburgh Reporter: "We've offered support from our officials in Education to work with the Citadel to see what can be done.

"Ultimately, that funding was well oversubscribed. It is a £3 million+ pot which probably had three or four times the subscriptions, as it always does every year. And it's really disappointing we're unable to fund all the projects as much as we'd like to. But that again is part of that continued erosion of public sector funding to this city. The fact we have no flexibility in how we can allocate money, things like the visitor levy being delayed and delayed things like our net zero – having great plans and having the government pull funding on it – means that everything has to be looked at again.

"I'm sorry, we've not been able to fund Citadel and other projects to the levels we would like to across the city. But we're absolutely working with Citadel and any other project

that suffered a reduction in their funding to make sure that it can have the least impact possible. But I won't sit here and pretend – it is difficult. My colleague in Education has had to make these difficult decisions, and I absolutely commit to working with Willy and the Citadel team to make sure that we can try our best to resolve this – but we're not awash with funding to support all these initiatives.”

EVOC response with an offer of help

Bridie Ashrowan, CEO of EVOC, said: “For a number of years EVOC has received funding from The City of Edinburgh Council for the work we do to support a network of over 100 organisations working with children and families in the city.

“As a result of this investment we are able to work with this network to access training, deliver work around equalities, to influence decisions and manage communications with the Council who cannot talk to 100 organisations on a regular basis.

“This funding, which has ranged from £50K to just under £100K, doesn't come from the Connected Communities Fund and has not impacted the decisions made in the recent round of grants awarded.

“The objective of the new approach to the Connected Communities Fund was to help more organisations get funding. However, Willy and the team at Citadel face a terrible challenge as a result of the maximum funding amount being reduced. EVOC did talk to the council on how to get the money to reach more city-based organisations, in more locations. I would like to reach out to him and Citadel as they are a brilliant innovative organisation.

“If it was within my power I would double the children, young people and families budget, but in a time of financial concerns that isn't possible. Citadel is a brilliant, innovative organisation and I would like to reach out to Willy

and team and see how we might support them moving forward in the near future.”

LOCAL POLITICIANS RESPONSE

Cllr Katrina Faccenda who represents the Leith Ward said: “I am disappointed to see the Citadel lose such a significant part of its funding from the council, the work they do is vital to our community in Leith and the surrounding areas.

“Unfortunately the new grant process lacked the transparency that I would expect when public money is being spent and I have written to the Convener, Cllr Griffiths, to ask important questions regarding why full details of awards have not been shared publicly, what consultation the two umbrella organisations EVOC and LAYC carried out with the organisations they are reported to represent, and why there was not more assessment of the impact of the decisions taken. Doing this retrospectively is not acceptable as the damage will have been done.”

Deidre Brock, MP for Edinburgh North and Leith, said: “I’m very concerned by this news. A funding cut of this size will have profound effects on the ability of the Citadel Youth Centre to continue to provide anything like the level of amazing services and support to vulnerable individuals and families in Leith they provide now.

“I find it shocking there has been no dialogue with any of the organisations involved, no impact assessment of the consequences of this cut in funding and by the wholesale lack of transparency throughout the grant process. This will, I greatly fear, have long term impacts and consequences wider than the organisations involved, impacting communities already reeling from Westminster Tory cuts.”

Ben Macpherson MSP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith said: “I was very concerned to hear from the Citadel that their funding

from the council is to be cut so drastically. I understand that there are real pressures on public budgets at the moment but such a sudden reduction of this magnitude seems very unfair and unnecessary – negatively affecting a well-known, respected and positively impactful local organisation that helps a lot of people.

“I urge the Council to meet with the Citadel as soon as possible and urgently reconsider their decision.”

Cllr Joan Griffiths, Education Convener, said: “Our Connected Communities Edinburgh grants programme tackles the impact of poverty on children, families and communities across all communities in Edinburgh. At the start of the process we engaged and listened to third sector and voluntary organisations about their first-hand knowledge of what the need was in our communities and where funding should be directed.

“The quality of applications for the grants programme was extremely high with many creative and well-presented submissions. In total we had funding bids of £16.7million from our available budget of £10million over the three years. This meant not everyone who made submissions would receive the funding they asking for however we will support those organisations who have been impacted to apply for alternative funding streams.

“These grants, which includes 19 new organisations, will benefit vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and their families in Edinburgh. We will of course continue to monitor the progress of the funding over the coming three years to ensure the outcomes promised for our communities are being delivered.”

As well as council funding the Citadel relies on donations and the work of the Friends of the Citadel. Anyone can become a Friend for a donation of £5 per month or more, and it is also

possible for firms and workplaces to become friends.

The Citadel runs youth clubs, trips and life lessons for anyone who lives in Leith up to the age of 21. The centre works with families, young mothers, volunteers and older people. There is a service of one to one help offered for individual children and young people who “need a little extra help”. And the organisation is open to anyone volunteering with them so that they can keep on running services for the local community. But their work depends on having enough funds to keep the £700,000 a year organisation afloat.

CITADEL