

Council scraps plans for 'civic projections' to mark city's 900th birthday

Edinburgh Council has scrapped plans to spend £120,000 on a series of outdoor projections to celebrate the city's 900th birthday.

The funds will instead help community groups organise events to mark the capital's historic milestone.

It comes despite the council already going out to tender for a contractor to provide "night-time outdoor public projection mappings" which it was hoped would "enhance civic pride".

A councillor welcomed the move but said it was "shambolic" that resources and officer time had been "wasted in producing the tender only for it to be cancelled at this late stage".

A programme, which includes a series of talks and tours, is aiming to "examine how Edinburgh came to be over the centuries, from commerce to conflict and from faith to finance, there are an incredibly rich and varied set of themes".

Festivities kicked off last month as the King and Queen attended a celebration at Edinburgh Castle and were treated to energetic performances by dancers and musicians.

The anniversary marks nine centuries since King David I introduced a new system of local government into Scotland by creating royal burghs.

The authority advertised a £120k contract for “content creation, projection mapping, and logistical execution”.

“Civic projects” were due to be beamed onto “iconic sites within the city” to create “free, un-ticketed installations that tell Edinburgh’s history and story at night” between September and March next year.

It was hoped the art installations would “enhance civic pride, engage with our rich cultural history, and support our vibrant creative sector”.

Community organisations were also invited to apply for a share of £100k to put on local community events. However many were left disappointed after the council was only able to allocate funding to 30 out of a total 97 eligible applicants.

Edinburgh’s Labour, Lib Dem and Green councillors tabled a joint motion on noted the fund had been “considerably oversubscribed”.

“Edinburgh 900, as a celebration of the city, is a celebration of the communities that make it and therefore feels it would be more appropriate to end the ongoing work on outdoor projections and to reallocate this funding to support previously unsuccessful civic and community applications up to the funding total,” the motion passed at the culture and communities committee said.

SNP councillors criticised the decision to set aside £500k in the budget for a “party” while services face cuts, and in June the Greens’ Dan Heap said questioned if spending a significant chunk of on outdoor projections was “absolutely necessary at a time where people are struggling”.

Commenting after the decision was scrapped at the meeting on Thursday, August 8 SNP culture spokesperson Finlay McFarlane said: “The Labour-led council have finally completed their embarrassing U-turn since controversially allocating £500,000

towards a big civic knees-up and are now due to scrap their plans for extortionate outdoor projections.

“The SNP were clear from the start that this money would have been better allocated to cash-strapped libraries and community centres but since the funds allocation we have consistently pushed for Labour to do the right thing and release the money to be spent directly by the city’s cultural and community organisations to ensure that Edinburgh’s 900 is delivered for the city, by the city and across the entirety of the city.

“Whilst this latest U-Turn is welcome and will ensure even more grassroots events can go ahead, it is just shambolic that so much resource and council officer time has been wasted in producing the tender only for it to be cancelled at this late stage.”

Culture and Communities Convener, Councillor Val Walker said: “Members of the Culture and Communities Committee have reallocated £120,000 of funding within the Edinburgh 900 programme.

“The projections element of the programme will now not go ahead. These funds will now be used to finance further community and civic projects across the city, in addition to the already allocated £200,000 worth of grants.

“We were really impressed at the overwhelming response from community groups across the city, which shows how this programme is resonating with our residents. We have consistently said that the people of Edinburgh should be at the heart of celebrating 900 years of its history and our decision reflects this.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter