

EIJB reject proposed cuts to third sector

The Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB) met on Friday and approved the terms of a cross party proposal – which means there will be no immediate cuts to third sector organisations.

The proposal to cut £4.5 million of grants to more than 60 bodies in the city was made in a 200+ page report published about 4pm last Friday – only a week before today's meeting. Whether or not there will be further cuts proposed as part of a more in depth look at the structure of the organisation remains to be seen.

The EIJB agenda actually included many more items than just that – but this was the only one that most people had turned up to listen to. The public gallery in the Dean of Guild Court Room (always too hot and stuffy on any day) was full of people making and supporting deputations, and Health and Social Care Partnership staff were on hand to put people into an overflow room.

There were around 60 or so people from various third sector organisations outside the City Chambers who continued to chant as the meeting got underway just after 10am. The background to what was being discussed [is in this article here](#) and in our Twitter thread below – but the bottom line is that without this core funding many of these bodies would simply have closed with an estimated 100 or so redundancies immediately.

We are at the City Chambers where around 50 people have gathered outside before the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board meeting which is just getting underway One of the bodies funded by the EIJB is [@Cyrenians1968](#) We spoke to CEO Ewan Aitken pic.twitter.com/EMKn9cryp8

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [November 1, 2024](#)

Underfunding

Many people who spoke today mentioned that the EIJB had been set up with a funding gap of £32 million almost at its inception.

Chief Officer, Pat Togher, was attending his final board meeting as he is resigning to move to a similar role in Glasgow. He introduced the report on which the discussion was based, saying that the “recommendation to remove the grant funding from next year represents a three per cent reduction of that budget”.

He explained that by removing that 3% the board would be able to protect the rest of the funding, but warned that the body still has to face up to £50 million of savings next year.

He also explained that the EIJB and the Health and Social Care Partnership was not in a massively different situation from other IJBs “up and down the country right now”. But his main point was that there is a risk that “we retreat back to core statutory services”. He also said that “moving forward there is a requirement to produce collaborative working”.

He then passed over to Strategic Planning officer, Andrew Hall, whose view of the situation was that “everything has been scrutinised. The knowledge that is generated from this level of analysis puts responsibility on us as officers and

the board as decision makers.”

He suggested that “huge progress” had been made in terms of delivering savings and yet the EIJB remains hugely over committed financially. He said: “We will not break even this year, and we are looking at a substantial deficit of £50 million next year.

“As we sit here today, without a significant injection of additional funding, we will not be able to meet statutory obligations.”

Board member, Peter Knight, said that he had learned a lot from the deputations. Although he had been a member of the board for around three years he found the deputation from Brenda Black very enlightening – and that some of the information was news to him.

Moira Pringle, Chief Financial Officer, said: “We are unable to find any other alternatives. Clearly this is a very emotive issue but the board must be clear that we have looked at everything.”

EIJB Chair, Katharina Kasper, said: “We are underfunded. We have heard today about some of the negative impacts that will happen if cuts are made.

“It is not going to take much more for our whole system to really topple over. I think this is what the officers are grappling with.

“We don’t have enough money to fund health and social care – full stop. Now it is taking its toll on service users, on officers and on our staff. There seems to be the will from our council colleagues to have a discussion. This is not about the grants programme. We need more money in the system otherwise everybody will suffer.”

After the meeting the Chair said: “*The EIJB has listened to*

voices across Edinburgh and has voted not to proceed with in-year savings to third sector grants at this time. We have also agreed that the long-term under-funding of the EIJB cannot continue.

“We have committed to working with third sector partners and our partners in the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian to find a way forward which supports charities across the city.

“The EIJB’s budget deficit which was inherited from its partners in 2016 remains, with £60m savings required this year and £50m next year. The EIJB has a legal duty to protect core services such as care homes and drug death prevention services. If a solution cannot be found we will have to come back with a recovery plan to make these savings.”

Vice-Chair of EIJB, Cllr Tim Pogson, said that this is about the third time he has had this kind of discussion since he joined the board in 2022, and to have this discussion again today appears impossible to him. He said: “We have statutory responsibilities – we have responsibility to deliver packages of care, to support people in hospital and to deliver prescribed medicines. That is the priority.

“But we have to be sure we do not get to the point in this financial year when we turn round and say to Edinburgh’s citizens that we have run out of money and that there is no more money for prescriptions or any packages of care.”

COMPOSITE MOTION

Cllr Pogson had countersigned an alternative proposal (called a composite motion) along with councillors from other parties to reject making in year cuts.

He said that the relationship between the EIJB and the third sector needs to be improved – and they need to be brought into

the conversation.

Green councillor Alys Mumford said she realised it must be frustrating for officers to make the recommendations they have made today in the face of a daunting deficit.

She said: "There absolutely should be more conversation about how to spend public money and about what third sector investment looks like in future years, but this needs to involve the experience of the third sector. To withdraw this money midway through the year is a marginal cost saving.

"It will impact on the organisations and the people they serve but also on our abilities to reshape the community engagement and health and social work with all the knowledge from today that we need."

She said that as a board member she has not been given enough information about the possibility of the suggested alternative structure called a Public Social Partnership.

Cllr Max Mitchell said the stress and anxiety could have been avoided and criticised the board for a lack of foresight. But he conceded that there will be some really unpleasant decisions "coming down the road next year". I think things are so severe that a future decision on this will be unavoidable."

Liberal Democrat Cllr Alan Beal also supported the cross-party proposal, saying that the third sector have not yet been given a chance to respond to the new EIJB objectives which have been created. He pointed out that postponing the decision until the end of the financial year would allow them time to do so.

Board member and former SNP councillor, George Gordon, said there is insufficient information on which to take a decision. He said: "We don't actually know what these third sector organisations are doing so how can we actually make a decision on their future?"

Peter Knight said he was struck by the evidence he had listened to from Wester Hailes based GP, Dr Nora Murray-Cavanagh, earlier in the day. She had outlined the practice of prescribing non-medicinal solutions for patients which can help many avoid hospital or medical treatment.

Mr Knight said: "What we have here is a burning platform and that gives us an opportunity to move forward."

The Chair reminded members of the board that officers have to deliver a recovery plan, and that there is still a £26 million gap to be made up between now and the end of the year as well as the possibility of a £50 million deficit next year.

She said: "Stopping this grant funding this year would allow some certainty for officers in planning for next year. And it also gives us a strong commitment towards a PSP model."

The cross-party proposal was approved by 6 votes against 4 votes for the alternative proposal from the Chair.



