

Council's budget omits substantial new funding for holiday hubs

A councillor has spoken out as Edinburgh Council's budget for the next year has omitted substantial new funding for holiday hubs.

The scheme, which provides respite for families of children with additional support needs, has seen its provision cut in recent years.

It received an uplift of about £100,000 this year, but this is limited to hiring new managers, and will not lead to an increase in the amount of places or time provided by the scheme.

SNP group leader Councillor Simita Kumar said: "I wanted to thank all the parents and families who did deputations to Edinburgh Council. Your courage and advocacy on behalf of your children is truly inspiring.

"I'm genuinely sorry that Labour councillors did not see the value of holiday hubs or the need for additional investment. This additional investment is still a cut to the services that have been delivered in the past.

"The impact of this on children and parents goes beyond the support needed for holiday periods. It goes to the very fabric of families being able to stay together, to get essential respite, and to flourish in an environment that is adapted for the benefit of those with additional support needs."

Speaking at a deputation during Thursday's full council meeting, one parent of a child who uses the holiday hubs said: "I'm here before you feeling broken, dejected, and not heard or understood by you, our elected councillors, on the importance of holiday hubs.

"We are speaking and giving voices to the many disabled children in Edinburgh. They are unseen, unheard and have needs that are not met daily.

"Why should our children not have the same equal opportunities as their neurotypical peers?

"As a group of ASN parents, we have tirelessly campaigned for Edinburgh Council to recognise the essential and vital need of holiday hubs to families that have no other option.

"We have been forgotten and bypassed until the situation was critical."

Another said: "Those who use the service know that it is not enough to provide what our children deserve.

"The funds are limited, the number of children requesting hubs has more than doubled. There are currently no plans to assess allocation based on the needs of the children. Some children who need this service the most will be excluded."

Labour councillor Mandy Watt said: "The people who have spoken to me about this passionately, I absolutely hear what they are saying.

"We have people with lived experience of being parents of children [with additional support needs] – right in our own group. Some of the comments that have been made today have been quite insulting to what they've experienced, what they've campaigned for, and the struggles they've gone through bringing up their children.

"They have enormous empathy for the parents who came here

today. They have enormous care for them, and for every child in this city that needs help.

“We have been told that even putting more money in this year would not provide more places, and it would not provide more places fairly – places for children with the most needs.

“We are going to look at that going forward. We are going to look constructively at what we need for proper provision within the auspices of the council to be able to provide the right services to the children that need them the most, and come from the families with the least.”

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter