

# **Fringe take over former adult learning centre**

**After what seems like a relatively short time since 2023 when The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society (EFFS) was awarded £7 million of funding by the UK Government in their spring budget, the society will officially get the keys to its new base today.**

EFFS is taking over the former South Bridge Community Resource Centre on Infirmary Street. And, despite protestations at the time the funding was announced that the money would not be used to create “plush new offices” the building will indeed become the permanent building where the Fringe and the Fringe Society will have their headquarters.

The council agreed to rent the building to EFFS on a long lease as it would save them around £176,000 of maintenance per year for a building which had been on the At Risk Register in 2020. It is understood to be a peppercorn rent.

The Society says the new building will reduce its carbon footprint, and that this space will provide an opportunity for a publicly accessible space for artists and the Fringe community. Only two of the previous tenants of the building youth group, Canongate Youth, and Totally Sound will be able to remain in the former adult learning centre although they are decanting while works proceed during the next twelve

months. Others, such as the Adult Learners Forum and The Pottery Users Group, were not so fortunate and had to find new homes. Criticism was levelled at the council for the way it interacted with the tenants with some tenants saying they had little contact or information at all.

As well as the capital funding from the UK Government additional funds were made available through grants from the Foyle Foundation and SP Energy Networks' Transmission Net Zero Fund.

A council report in April 2023, when a lease to the EFFFs was recommended, set out the reasons for the Fringe's move: "As part of the wider 10-year vision, EFFFs has been seeking to secure an iconic building within the city centre through which their future can be protected via a redeveloped and reimagined Festival and Community hub. This would allow the amalgamation and consolidation of their current occupied buildings which would, over time, create a more sustainable financial platform from which the Fringe would operate."

In addition to developing the new base, other UK Government funding of more than £1 million will help the Fringe Society in delivering the Keep it Fringe fund and investment in digital architecture which EFFFs say is essential to its services to artists, media, arts industry and audiences.

## **Major legacy**

EFFFs has also announced a major legacy gift of £1 million from the Foyle Foundation and £250,000 from SP Energy Networks' Transmission Net Zero Fund – a £5m pot set up to support community groups and organisations with their low carbon ambitions.

The project will focus on the renovation and restoration of the Grade B listed former schoolhouse built in 1885 in the Old Town. Plans include preserving the building's rich history

while modernising it to maximise accessibility and sustainability. This includes the installation of a lift and a Changing Places toilet which was included in the scheme as a result of pressure by Cllr Finlay McFarlane; energy efficiency upgrades such as heritage-appropriate windows, improved insulation, and the replacement of gas heating with air source heating pumps which will significantly improve the building's environmental sustainability.

Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, said: "This is an exciting moment which has taken nearly two years of planning and discussion to get to this point. The conversion of South Bridge Resource Centre into a year-round Fringe home will allow local cultural and community organisations and Fringe artists the opportunity to utilise this space as well as being a new space for the Fringe Society team.

"It will allow a permanent home for our August community hub, known as Fringe Central, which artists, arts industry, media and international delegates access each summer for events, networking and industry gatherings. This is a significant moment for the Fringe in ensuring a permanent home for the festival. Our grateful thanks the UK Government, the Foyle Foundation and SP Energy Networks for recognising our vision and supporting us in bringing it to life.'

Arts Minister Sir Chris Bryant said: "The Edinburgh Fringe is one of the UK's finest cultural festivals, attracting audiences and performers from all over the world every August.

"But the Fringe is not just for August. This new permanent home means that the Fringe Society can have a secure and meaningful presence in the city all year round, to support artists and provide the local community with access to arts spaces."

David Hall, CEO of The Foyle Foundation, said "The Foyle

Foundation was seeking a Scottish project of strategic importance and long-term transformational benefit to support. The new Fringe home answers perfectly and is our legacy project for Scotland. It provides a permanent base, stability and excellent new facilities for the Fringe Society, as well as a year-round additional resource for Scottish performers and artists. The Foundation is delighted to partner with the Fringe to enable this project to happen.”

Guy Jefferson, Transmission Managing Director at SP Energy Networks, said: “We’re proud to support the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society as they take their first steps in this exciting new venture. With our help, the team are creating a space where the local community can experience all of the cultural benefits of the city’s arts festival, year-round – using low carbon technology to reduce the site’s emissions by as much as 80%.

“Our Transmission Net Zero Fund was launched to support community groups and organisations across central and southern Scotland who are making bold strides towards their own net zero ambitions. It’s brilliant to see Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society reach this milestone and we’re excited to watch the project come to life.”

Refurbishment work will now be carried out to the building and the hope is that it will be open to the public from the beginning of next year.



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