

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL MEETING – 20 MARCH 2025

Discussion of Cllr Staniforth's motion on Edinburgh Women's Aid

Video of full meeting: https://edinburgh.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/971088

Video clip of discussion of the motion: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ztmqy_SPYw

Cllr Staniforth (Scottish Green Party)

Lord Provost, it was never our intention to defund services, as I hope the amendment we put forward makes clear. However, it is our intention to accept the SNP Lib Dem composite. We're resigned to the fact we won't get a comprehensive review, but at least that leaves us with a briefing that will identify gaps in services for trans and non binary people. I also want to make it clear that I think Edinburgh Women's Aid does excellent work. However, this council would surely not allow any other minority to be automatically excluded from services, and I found it quite disturbing how the deputation sought to weaponise the needs of other minorities to exclude trans people. We've seen in America that the rolling back of trans people's rights and discrimination against trans people is just the start. It is the first step towards the dominance of cis het white men over all others. Every time any public figure in the UK stands up for trans people or tries to expand trans people's rights, there are those in the media and social media who will stir up a transphobic mob against them. I have experience of this. It is nothing less than the exclusion of trans people from public life and decisions like this from Edinburgh Women's Aid only empower them. Thank you.

Cllr Mumford (Scottish Green Party)

Thanks Lord Provost. People here will have heard me say in committee more than once that I have friends who are only here today because of the excellent work of violence against women organisations in this city. I also have friends who are not here today because of transphobia. This motion is not about withdrawing funding from vital services, but about making sure that all women are supported in an intersectional way. Trans women need to know what support they can access in the city, some of which is indeed provided by Edinburgh Women's Aid. We agree that honesty and transparency are vital, especially in the face of the misinformation in the media and the rampant transphobia and misogyny we are all witnessing which impacts on all women, trans and cis. The law on this is not settled. The definition of women and man is still undergoing legal scrutiny, as well as to whether single sex includes trans people, as I believe it does. What all legal experts are agreed upon is the Equality Act of 15 years ago is not explicit on these definitions, and that while it's fair to discriminate against individuals in certain circumstances, it's not appropriate to apply blanket discrimination against an entire group of people. Equally Safe is clear that to challenge violence against women and girls, we must challenge damaging gender stereotypes. I don't want to be seen as less than a woman because I don't have kids or given suspicious looks in the toilet because I have short, fabulous hair. This is the route down which biological essentialism leads, and why it's so important to speak out clearly and say that trans women are women and we stand with them.

Cllr Meagher (Scottish Labour)

For brevity, I want to give an example why a trauma informed support for single sex spaces matters vitally. I have a very close family member who has Down syndrome, who has dementia and who needs intimate personal care. She is also a rape survivor. She's a survivor of two separate rapes. She is extremely vulnerable, and a trauma informed approach tells us that she is entitled to have the intimate care she needs given by a woman. A trauma informed approach to supporting women have been a victim of male violence must include offering single sex facilities such as domestic violence refuges. Under the Equality Act 2010 it is lawful for service providers such as Edinburgh Women's Aid to provide such a facility, and they must be able to do so as a matter of policy. And I am utterly content by the account from the deputation this morning, that they also offer support and services to trans

women who equally need the support that they are offered by Edinburgh Women's Aid.
Thank you.

Cllr Faccenda (Scottish Labour)

I'm just going to formally second, Lord Provost.

Cllr McInnes (Scottish National Party)

My apologies. I was very pleased to hear from the Greens that there was no intention about potential defunding of Edinburgh Women's Aid in their original motion. It's very clear from the very first paragraph of our SNP, Lib Dem composite text that we do not want to see this happen. We recognise the valuable, vital work Edinburgh Women's Aid delivers for vulnerable members of our communities, and that we as a council, remain committed to supporting that organisation in its endeavours. It's important, however, for us also to support and affirm the rights and dignity of trans people who form a...part of our community. The amendment that we brought forward, clearly states that we're committed to the rights of all women, including cis and trans women, and that the council believes that support must be available to all those who depend upon it, including trans people. We've got two asks in this amendment, and I'll be quick. The first is to have the council leader set out to Edinburgh Women's Aid the importance of providing services to trans women, and to ask how the organisation can further facilitate this. It is not intended in any way to undermine the work of Edinburgh Women's Aid... It is intended to widen the conversation about delivery of much needed services to trans and non binary women. That is the second ask that we have, that we are properly briefed on the services that are available to trans and non binary members of our community, so that we can take future decisions around funding, etc, in a better informed manner.

Cllr Fullerton (Scottish National Party)

We were going to, I was going to second this amendment, but we're now going to withdraw in favour of the composite motion.

Cllr Bennett (Scottish Liberal Democrats)

Thank you, Lord Provost. Everyone who has experienced abuse, violence, rape or any form of trauma deserves compassion and protection, regardless of their identity. At the same time, every survivor processes trauma differently. Everyone experiences trauma differently and responds differently, and no one has the right to dictate what should or shouldn't make another person feel safe. So can we all commit to listening to each other, listening to both cis and trans women? Can we work together to create solutions that support traumatised people? Women's Aid is doing incredible work. Can we work with them? We're not here to vilify Women's Aid. We need to support them, to offer multiple therapy options so the people have a choice, ensure therapy is tailored to individuals. And we also consider for a moment that trans women experience situations where they feel unsafe. As a friend of mine said to me last night, a trans woman, our voices are virtually non existent in the discourse. It is vital that every survivor has the opportunity to heal in a space where they feel safe. We can't tell people how they should heal from their own trauma. That's ridiculous, but we can stop fighting. We can have constructive conversations and find ways to support the expert services to help the traumatised people that need them.

Cllr Dijkstra-Downie (Scottish Liberal Democrats)

I'm happy to do that formally, thank you, Lord Provost.

Cllr Booth (Scottish Green Party)

Thank you, Lord Provost, given the composite amendment covers the issues here we are withdrawing this amendment, addendum.

Cllr Mowat (Scottish Conservatives)

Thank you, Lord Provost. We live in a time where defending women's rights to private spaces and services has become controversial and divisive. I am old enough to remember that in some careers women were expected to leave when they became pregnant, were expected to yield their positions and opinions for men. Today, we will not yield and I ask you to support our amendment which recognises the important work of Edinburgh's Women's Aid, and that they carry this out in accordance with the law. The Equality Act 2010, which applies in Scotland, allows for the provision of single sex services and permits organisations such as Edinburgh Women's Aid, to exclude individuals who have the protected characteristic of gender reassignment from certain spaces where this is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. What is more legitimate than that of providing services to women who have been abused? We heard the statistics in the deputation this morning. Most people who experience domestic violence are women. Most will have been abused by men. There are provisions in place for those who do not fall into these categories. If we need to do more for these groups, then let this not be at the expense of women who have been asked to yield once too often.

Cllr Munro (Scottish Conservatives)

Thank you, Lord Provost. We have brought this amendment because we believe it is essential to prioritise the safety and the wellbeing of women who have suffered from domestic abuse. Edinburgh Women's Aid has been serving women exclusively for 50 years. Our amendment reflects a commitment to safeguarding these critical services which provide vital support for women and girls who have experienced the profound trauma, Lord Provost, of domestic abuse. Now we must always strive for inclusivity in the protection and the rights of all individuals, including trans individuals, but we must ensure that women's services remain intact and able to meet the specific needs of women survivors of domestic abuse. This is why we are proposing this amendment to affirm our support for the continuation of single sex spaces in Edinburgh Women's Aid. The Scottish Conservatives, we have, and we always will continue to protect the rights of women and girls to have single sex spaces. This has been our position both at Holyrood and here at local government level. It remains steadfast today. Women's safety must always come first. Thank you.

Cllr Mattos Coelho (Scottish National Party)

I move the composite amendment and want to emphasise the support for Edinburgh Women's Aid and the need for all women cis and trans to be supported. I move the composite.

Cllr Davidson (Scottish Liberal Democrats)

Thanks, Lord Provost. All victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence should have an expectation that publicly funded services are there for them, and that does create genuine conflict sometimes, but right now, that conflict has meant that trans women and non binary people understandably feel that this is not the case for them. As one of my constituents sent an email to me just today, convincing my trans child that they have a place in this city's future can be really hard. All we are asking in this composite amendment is that publicly funded services protect all women, cis and trans. I genuinely hope that this amendment can be the beginning of a productive conversation with Women's Aid and all other providers so that we can ensure that the great work they do is available to all victims.

Lord Provost

Sorry, is there a second composite? I hadn't been made aware of that. Mover of the second composite, but somebody who didn't speak before.

Cllr Watt (Scottish Labour)

So in moving this composite, I need to speak in support of Women's Aid. Fifty years they've been providing services in this city for traumatised women, providing them when there were

no services, campaigning for them, campaigning so that women can actually stay in their homes rather than having to seek refuge. The motion that was put before us today, they came and answered it in a deputation. They explained how they provide the services that are needed for trans people and non binary people alike, and then to continue to aver that they don't is irresponsible. What are you trying to do? Stop trans women from going to Women's Aid by telling them that they won't be well received. That is just irresponsible. Women's Aid will provide a service. They do provide a service to women and to trans women and non binary people alike. So I can't support something that suggests that they don't. That's why I'm moving this composite.

Lord Provost

Thanks so much. Councilor Watt and seconder?

Cllr Whyte (Scottish Conservatives)

Lord Provost, thank you. This composite brings together what we have put forward and the Labour Party put forward because we feel very strongly about this. I believe the motion itself is iniquitous. Councillor Staniforth may say he doesn't seek to defund Women's Aid, but that seems to be the aim of paragraph three. I cannot see why you would write it that way otherwise, and the motion completely ignores the work that we heard Women's Aid tell us today, that they already use their experienced work to help all sorts of categories of people, including trans women, but most importantly, they have to be able to use that experience to decide whether they need a single sex service. Those services provide for people who wouldn't otherwise use the service. They have to feel safe, and that's how they can choose to best assist their clients. We should respect their expertise around that. This isn't...to be heard. Charity gets a six rating from the care inspector. A top rating, I can't see why others don't see the need to protect single sex spaces and services, especially for abused women at their most vulnerable point. Thanks very much.

Lord Provost

We move back to Councillor Stanford to indicate which, if any of the amendments, addendums, he is prepared to accept.

Cllr Staniforth (Scottish Green Party)

As I said at the start of my speech Lord Provost, we will accept the SNP Liberal Democrat composite amendment. We will not accept any other amendments. Thanks.

VOTES FOR SNP LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COMPOSITE AMENDMENT

38 for the motion, 22 against the motion.

Composite amendment as voted for:

City of Edinburgh Council
20th March 2025
Item 8.5 - Motion by Councillor Staniforth -
Edinburgh Women's Aid and Support for Trans
Women

Deletes all and replaces with:

"Council

1. recognises and fully supports the vital work of Edinburgh Women's Aid in providing essential services and funding for victims of domestic violence, ensuring that all service users, including cis and trans women, receive the support they need and are able to access services through Women's Aid. Therefore, Council remains committed not to defund these vital services.
2. affirms the rights and dignity of trans people, who while representing a small minority of the population, are valued members of our community. The Council acknowledges the need for inclusive and respectful services that address their specific challenges while balancing the rights and needs of all groups.
3. recognises the importance of protecting single-sex spaces as defined in law to ensure dignity and protection from potential risks, including harassment or violence.
4. recognises the vital importance of Edinburgh Council continuing to fund support services for those facing domestic abuse and sexual violence, and in line with our position on LGBTQ+ equality, believes this support must be available to all those who depend on it, including trans people.
5. commits to ensuring that the rights of all women, including cis and trans women, are protected. The Council supports clear, compassionate policies that uphold safety, dignity, and fairness for everyone.
6. agrees that the Leader of the Council should write to Edinburgh Women's Aid to set out the importance of providing services to trans women and to ask how the organisation can provide this.
7. requests a briefing note for all Elected Members within one cycle setting out the current support that is available for trans and non-binary people facing domestic abuse in Edinburgh, and any identified gaps in this provision."

Moved by: Cllr Lesley Macinnes
Seconded by: Cllr Euan Davidson

