

Southside Community Centre Association

Expressions of Interest for Café Services Providers

October 2026

Summary

The Southside Community Centre SCIO is inviting Expressions of Interest from prospective operators to become the **Café Services Provider** for our vibrant community centre.

This document has been prepared to provide interested parties with information relating to our café, our community centre, and our charity.

Expressions of Interest should be submitted using our [online form](#) **no later than 5pm on Friday 23 October 2026.**

Our intention is to decide w/b 26 October 2026 as to which, if any, of the parties who have submitted an expression of interest will proceed to the next stage of submitting a full proposal by 20 November 2026.

The opportunity

We are seeking an experienced café operator to take on and develop an established café at the heart of a busy and well-used community centre. Serving both centre users and local residents, the café provides an important social space alongside the wide range of activities, services, and events that take place in the centre.

Currently operated in-house, the café benefits from an existing customer base, a fully equipped kitchen, and a dedicated seating area with potential for future improvements. We are looking for an operator who can build on these strong foundations by providing affordable, high-quality food and drink in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

As well as a café service there is scope to provide internal catering for centre events, as well as the opportunity to host café related events. It would be possible to provide a takeaway service, but we wouldn't expect this to be the primary focus of the café operation.

We welcome a broad range of proposals and are particularly interested in operators who share our commitment to serving the whole community, including people on lower incomes, and who can help the café continue to play a positive role in community life.

More information on our café and community centre is provided in this document.

Minimum requirements

We are looking for an operator who can provide a safe and well-managed café environment, with appropriate food safety and hygiene measures in place. They will also need to meet the requirements for managing risks across the café and community centre, including fire safety and building security. Any proposal must not have a detrimental impact upon the day-to-day operations of our community centre.

Core operating hours

The minimum core hours that we would expect an operator to be open would be:

- Monday – Friday, 10.30am – 2.30pm – full café provision

We would ideally like some provision on Saturday, although this could be reduced from the full weekday menu.

The total available operating hours would be:

- Monday – Friday, 9am-8.30pm
- Saturday – Sunday, 9.30am-8.30pm

Café Service Provider contract period

The entry date would be by negotiation with the successful operator, but we would expect this to be no later than 11 January 2027.

While we are open to considering different lengths of agreement, we hope to establish a long-term partnership through this opportunity and would prefer commitments for a minimum of 12 months.

The arrangement will commence with a six-month trial period, after which both parties will review how it is working before agreeing any longer-term continuation.

Please note that our community centre is not operational from late July until early September each year due to a single tenant taking the entire building for the Fringe period. The café premises are not available during this time.

Financial arrangements

The Board of Trustees' primary objective is to secure a welcoming and sustainable café offer that meets the needs of centre users and the wider community.

We are open to different approaches to the financial arrangements and have no predetermined expectations of occupation charges/rent. Instead, we are keen to hear a range of proposals and will work with prospective operators to agree arrangements that prioritise a long-term partnership and reflect the social value benefits delivered through the café.

How to submit an Expression of Interest

Enquiry and viewings

We encourage anyone interested in this opportunity to first arrange a visit with our Chief Executive. This will give you the opportunity to see the café and centre in person, learn more about our community, and understand how the café has been run to date.

Viewings will take place until Friday 16 October 2026. Early viewings are encouraged.

To arrange a viewing please email: hello@southsidecommunitycentre.co.uk

Submitting an Expression of Interest

Expressions of Interest should be submitted using our [online form](#) **no later than 5pm on Friday 23 October 2026.**

Interested parties will need to prepare and submit the following information with their EOI:

1. Organisation name (if applicable)
2. Contact name
3. Contact number and email
4. Short overview of relevant experience operating a cafe, catering service, or similar (max 200 words)
5. Short overview of why the operator is interested in this opportunity (max 200 words)
6. Confirmation the operator can/will meet the minimum operating requirements:
 - Core hours
 - Health and safety and hygiene requirements
7. Details of a referee who can comment on relevant experience

Please note:

- We will not accept an EOI from parties who have not undertaken a viewing.
- All EOIs will be acknowledged by email. If you have not received an acknowledgement by 5pm, Monday 26 October 2026, please contact the centre between 10am and 4pm on 0131 667 0484.
- Canvassing of Trustees is not permitted.
- Late submissions will not be considered.
- Only complete submissions will be considered.

Notification of successful EOI and next steps

We are carrying out a two-stage selection process for the Café Services Provider. The Board of Trustees will review Expressions of Interest and notify prospective operators if their EOI is successful.

Following a successful EOI, prospective operators will be invited to submit a detailed proposal. This is expected to include a short business plan setting out how the café would be operated, likely menu, staffing, and minimum requirements including insurance and hygiene.

Proposals will be submitted in November, following which we will agree contractual arrangements ahead of a 11 January 2027 (latest) opening date.

About our community centre

What we do

Our building has operated as a community centre in the heart of the Southside neighbourhood since 1983. The building is owned by City of Edinburgh Council, and leased to our charity, with both organisations working together to manage the centre for public benefit.

We have four spaces available for community use – a very large theatre style hall located on our first floor and two general purpose rooms and café located on our ground floor.

We hire our spaces to arts, cultural, and community organisations, as well as deliver some services and activities in-house.

Operating hours and opening periods

Since 2024 our centre has operated seven days a week. Our current opening times are:

- Monday to Friday, 9am until 8.30pm
- Saturdays and Sundays, 9:30am until 8.30pm

The community centre is used as an Edinburgh Fringe venue for around six weeks each year and is managed by an external partner during this period. Our regular activities are paused during this time, including the café.

We also usually close for a short period over Christmas and New Year.

About our charity

The Southside Community Centre Association SCIO has existed in its current form since 2022 but has existed in other forms for many years. We are a membership-based organisation, with our members appointing a committee of Trustees each year to oversee the charity.

The work of our charity focuses on:

1. The provision of a well-managed and welcoming community hub where citizens from the Southside area and beyond can access a range of activities, services and events which support them to thrive.
2. Directly delivering a range of activities and services which challenge poverty, address loneliness and isolation, lifelong learning, bring people together, and nurturing creativity.

About our café

Current trading arrangements

We currently operate the café as an in-house service and have done so since January 2026. The café currently operates:

- Monday – Thursday, 9.45am – 4pm
- Friday, 9.45am – 3pm

Our café is staffed by one full-time and one part-time employee, supported throughout the week by a small cohort of volunteers.

The current customer base of the café is split between centre users (those in the centre to take part in an activity or access a service) and centre visitors (those from the local neighbourhood who visit the centre to use the café only).

Sales in the first three months of the current financial year amounted to £9,330, from 3475 customer sales (note these include repeat customers).

All food and drink costs amounted to £2,943 in the first three quarters of the current financial year, with staffing costs of around £11,000 (including employer costs for 1.5 FTE staff) during the same period.

Current menu

All menu items are available throughout each trading day. We would expect the successful operator to consider the socioeconomic demographic of some of our service users and ensure that the café menu has affordable and healthy options available.

Our current menu and pricing includes:

- Coffee...£3
- Tea...£2
- Cans of juice...£1
- Scones (homemade) with butter and jam...£1.50
- Soup (homemade) with bread and croutons...£3.50
- Main meal...£5
- Breakfast rolls...£2 (single)...£2.50 (doubler)
- Breakfast plate...£6
- Toastie with salad...£2.50

Café kitchen and seating area

The kitchen is accessed directly from the centre's main corridor and comes with a range of equipment for the incoming operator to use (list below).

The café seating area is located adjacent to the kitchen and is also accessed from the main corridor. While there is no direct walkway between the two spaces, a large serving hatch provides a practical connection.

The seating area has a simple, neutral finish that reflects the character of the wider centre, while also offering opportunities for future improvements and personalisation. We would be happy for the incoming operator to suggest improvements to décor and layout, subject to centre approval.

Natural light is provided through a south-facing window, creating a bright and welcoming space.

The café currently provides seating across 22 tables and 35 chairs.

Current equipment

- Fridge
- Freezer
- Dishwasher
- Dual fuel range (6 x gas rings and 1 x electric over)
- Freestanding griddle
- Soup urns
- Ribbed contract grill
- Toaster
- Food processor
- Coffee machine
- Hot water boiler
- Various sinks
- Various pots, pans, baking trays and gastronome trays
- Various cutlery, crockery and glassware
- Various utensils