

New council website

✘ The City of Edinburgh Council believes it will make major savings following the launch of its new website. Scheduled to go live on 15 September, the site at www.edinburgh.gov.uk will provide easier ways for users to make payments, request information and ask for help. Anyone who accesses the council website regularly will know that it is very good but one can go round in circles if you don't quite know where to look. With 2 million unique visitors in the last 12 months it is important that the site works well.

While there is a one-off cost of £210,000 for creating the new website, there will be significantly lower annual costs for software licensing, support and hosting compared to previous systems. As well as a new website and intranet for the Council specifically, the new system also provides a 'platform' for around 200 other websites that the Council is involved in supporting. Initial savings will be around £190,000 per year with the potential for a further £100,000 annually as these other websites are moved.

Council Finance Convenor Councillor Phil Wheeler welcomed the development: "This is going to be real progress for the Council and improve markedly the experience that people have of using our website. Having seen how the site is progressing I'm confident that users will see a modern design that really works and helps them to do quickly and efficiently what they came for. The fact that we are saving money at the same time as improving what we do is exactly what we are trying to achieve in dealing with the challenges of the current budget situation."

Andrew Unsworth, the Council's head of e-Government, said: "This will be a major step forward for the Council and those that use our website. While the fact that the system pays for itself through the savings is important, we also see the

website as crucial in improving our customer services and we intend to achieve additional savings by encouraging contact from our customers via the web instead of mail, telephone or face to face.”

The projected savings do not take account of reduced costs resulting from increased demand for online transactions. Edinburgh residents’ usage of the web is above the UK and Scottish averages and studies have shown that costs per exchange range from £10 to £30 for face-to-face, £1 to £3 for telephone and 1p to 50p for web.

The new content management system is provided by Jadu, which is used by over 30 UK local authorities. The site promises clearer design and navigation, easier and faster access to the most popular tasks, and improved site search options powered by Google. Users will be able to register with the site, which will allow them to sign-up to receive relevant information and will make it easier to submit forms and carry out frequent transactions.