

Finance and Resources Committee 1 November 2011

✘ The Finance Committee faces a long agenda on Tuesday. One of the items it is to consider is a proposal to [bring wifi, better internet and better computers to all schools in the City of Edinburgh council area.](#)

The Council, in partnership with BT Global Services, currently provides IT service and support for over 50,000 staff, teachers and students across the local authority's nursery, primary, special, and secondary schools and community learning centres.

The last major refresh of educational ICT services was in 2006/07. At that time, the useful life of the hardware was estimated to be between four and seven years, so it seems timely to consider replacing them now. The idea is to improve the way that pupils of all ages learn while using the school buildings, and we can only think that the idea will meet with cross-party approval.

But another item which is to be mulled over, and which might provoke a little more heated discussion, is the possibility of the council borrowing the sum of £165,000 to extend the car park at the newly renovated Royal Commonwealth Pool. The proposal is to reinstate the number of car parking spaces which existed prior to the closure of the pool for the renovation works, and also to create 13 more.

The 'loan charges' are said in the report to be just over £4,500 for the first year and a rather astonishing £16,500 **each year** for the next **15 years**. We understand from speaking with the council that what must have been meant is that the repayments will be £16,500 per annum, and that this includes a capital element as well as interest. We hope so, but we have

not been able to confirm what the interest rate will be over the 11 year period. In any event the whole sum will have to be repaid by Edinburgh Leisure to the council over the next few years.

Apart from how much this extension to the car park would cost in total, there is a single line in the report which states that

“It is recognised that these additional spaces may be seen to encourage the use of the car to travel to and from the RCP. However, the promotion of a Green Travel Plan and provision of extra bike racks will encourage sustainable travel. The refurbishment proposals overall are designed to improve the building’s environmental rating, minimise waste and improve energy usage.”

We know what a Green Travel Plan is, but we wonder what part of such a plan includes increasing the facility for access by car? As for public transport, the tram will go nowhere near the Commonwealth Pool now or at any time in the near future, so visitors to the pool will have to rely on walking there, cycling or indeed jumping on a Number 14, 30, 33, 48, or x48 bus depending on where they start from. We expect that the Green group on the council may well have something to say about this.

Item number 9 on the agenda is an update on how the council is getting on with its planned savings proposed five months ago in its budget, starting with the mighty sum of £55m to be cut in this year’s finances alone.

This is described as a complex matter, which indeed it is, given that there are some 251 savings plans to be monitored. The report admits that 38 of these are causing some concern, which means they are not saving as much money as they should be, but, that said, the report also concludes that around £27.2m of the proposed £28.6m target should be achieved this

year.

The Property Conservation Department which has been at the centre of the ongoing enquiries into the way that the department handled Statutory Notice work, is being transferred to the control of Services for Communities, which is expected to result in a considerable saving.

Another factor which will affect how the council actually achieves these savings is said to be the adoption of the proposed Alternative Business Model which will be discussed at the full council meeting on 27 October 2011. This is the outsourcing of council responsibilities which the council believes will be a more efficient way of working. Part of that is the planned engagement of a company called Enterprise to conduct bin collections in the city. But when you delve into the detail of the savings achieved by the council thus far, it appears that the Services for Communities area is one where they are actually on target to achieve all of the planned cuts in expenditure. Out of the possible cuts of £9m they have already achieved 86% of that in this financial year.

Another item on the lengthy agenda is the report on the fate of the former Royal High School at Calton Hill. A 2008 competition attracted suggestions of various possible uses for the buildings and most notably from Duddingston House Properties who might develop the site into "an exclusive hotel of international standing." This has now progressed into the possibility of the parties signing a legal document known as Heads of Terms which would then allow both the council and the developer to progress towards an official lease of the property, although the planning process has still to be dealt with. If the developer does not enter into the Heads of Terms by the end of this year, then the council says it will remarket the site. DHP is the company which owns the old Odeon cinema and was refused permission earlier this year to demolish it and turn it into a hotel. The latest information on that property is that the owners [have submitted a survey](#)

[report](#) confirming the existing condition of the former cinema to the council's planning department. Some of the photographs show what the surveyors describe as fair condition.

The council's [Finance & Resources Committee](#) meets on 1 November 2011 at the City Chambers at 10.00a.m. All of these meetings are open to the public. The full agenda is below:-

[Agenda_01-1.11.11](#)