

Council rule out the ABM option for good



The City of Edinburgh Council [today decided](#) to keep all jobs in-house, and brought to an end the possibility of using the Alternative Business Model which it has investigated since 2009. When it was put to the vote the recommendation to use the external company, MITIE, was ruled out by 31 votes to 23. A second proposal NOT to privatise corporate and transactional services was unanimously approved without any comment.

The entire process has cost the council around £3.2m over the three years since it was first proposed. The savings which the ABM scheme estimated for the Integrated Facilities Management roles within the council covering areas such as provision of school meals, amounted to around £51m over the next 7 years. So what is clear from this rejection is that the council now have a task on their hands to ensure that all their departments run on, or under, budget in the foreseeable future. If not, then no doubt the LibDems or the Conservative Groups, who wanted to adopt ABM, will have something to say.

The split in the voting showed that the SNP group no longer seem to consider that they are in a coalition with the LibDems who were left out in the cold this morning, with only the Conservative Group for company. The Green Party also supported the amendment which was passed.

There has been much discussion at council meetings over the recent past about the proposal to privatise some council services, and many deputations have been made to the council by the unions and also campaign groups which have sprung up around the city. As recently as November the council voted against privatising refuse collections in the capital.

UNISON is the UK's largest public service union, and has maintained a dogged stance against the ABM proposal since it was first mooted.

UNISON branch President John Stevenson said:- "This is the best outcome we could have got."

He noted that it follows a union victory in November, which stopped environmental services being privatised, and the council had recently abandoned plans to privatise corporate and transactional services.

Speaking to this morning's council meeting, Mr Stevenson said:- "At the beginning of the process, the council made it clear that there would have to be a compelling case for privatisation.

"We clearly believe that a compelling case has not been made for privatisation and we believe we have consistently provided compelling and credible analysis and evidence to show that.

"The unions and council employees have put enormous work into this process.

"We have shown in detail that the in-house options have been realistic, fair and efficient – but most of all workable – especially if we have a level playing field and like is compared with like."

UNISON Scotland official Peter Hunter commented:- "This is the the death of Scotland's largest council privatisation proposal ever – which, given the NHS position, begs the question whether the door is permanently closed on future privatisation plans across the public sector as a whole?"

Another of the deputations at this morning's meeting was presented by Alyson Macdonald on behalf of *Greater Leith Against the Cuts*.

Macdonald said after the meeting:-

“By choosing to keep the services in the public sector, councillors have also kept them under democratic control. Conservative councillor Joanna Mowat accused the Labour, SNP, and Green groups, who voted against privatisation of “playing to the gallery”. However, we think it is important for the Council to show that residents’ views can influence decision-making, and hope that this will continue. It has been clear to us from speaking to members of the public, that there was very little support for these proposals, and we believe that most local people will welcome today’s decision.

Although we are pleased with today’s result, there are still plans to impose cuts on these services in the immediate future, which we will continue to campaign against.”

The campaign group is planning a meeting on Saturday 28 January 2012 at 1pm at the Royal High School Primary entitled “How Can We Move Away From The Cuts Agenda?”.

This meeting aims to give local residents an opportunity to hear about the recent campaign against the privatisation of Edinburgh’s public services, and to add their voices to our ongoing anti-cuts campaign. The Council will be setting their annual budget in February, and there will be local government elections in May. Macdonald continued:-“Rather than waiting for politicians to give us their opinions, we want to tell them what we think, and challenge them to represent their constituents’ views. There will be a focus on practical campaign planning, and finding effective ways to challenge public sector cuts affecting Edinburgh.”