

Streamlined Council – reorganisation planned



The Accounts Commission report published earlier in the week suggested that the council is facing more of a struggle with its finances than it may have previously thought. The council rebuffs that assertion by stating that it has already put measures in place to monitor its finances more closely.

One of the ways of dealing with financial matters might be to reduce the workforce. At present the council employs over 15,000 people, and if proposed changes are adopted then the overall numbers of staff will certainly reduce by several hundred.

But the rationale behind the proposed changes to the way the council will be run in future is not simply about money according to council leader, Andrew Burns. The ideas behind the new cooperative model with power devolved as far down the organisation as possible started some time ago, and are not simply a knee-jerk reaction to [the 'could do better' report](#). Instead what is proposed is a streamlined, efficient and less bureaucratic service with emphasis on problem solving. There will be four Locality areas with a council officer in charge of each.

[The Edinburgh Reporter NEWS talks to Edinburgh Council Leader from Phyllis Stephen on Vimeo.](#)

One of the most impressive facts in the report is that within the council there are 2,000 different job descriptions, and it is felt that this is just too many.



The council leader explained at the November council meeting that the report published today and which will be discussed by the full council next week is a 'huge piece of work' and was to be delayed by three weeks till December as it was quite simply not yet complete.

The proposal is to conjoin the twelve existing Neighbourhood Partnerships into four localities, more or less North, South, East and West. These will for the first time be the same areas as those proposed for health and social care. There are a few options in the report as to how services would then be organised, with lovely colour diagrams to illustrate them, but the end result will be the same : a better service.

Each area will have responsibility for council services with a 'clear reporting and accountability governance framework'. This will get rid of duplication across the council and focus instead on quality and efficiency.

It is admitted that the move towards the locality based model is based on fiscal pressures on the council which are fairly significant. The council needs to look at ways of rationalising the way they do business. But this is not the main driver. The council leader wants to move the council towards the more cooperative model that he has had in mind since taking office in 2012. Andrew Burns is currently the chair of the Cooperative Council Innovation Network and is keen to see more of the cooperative approach spread across all aspects of the council's work.

The model recommended by the Chief Executive is one which delayers the council structure and poses fewer levels of management between her and frontline council workers. At the present time the council has about 16 layers from the CEO to the person actually carrying out the work.

This is not to be the model of the future. The council is aware that it struggles often to resolve simple issues,

something which is quite common in large organisations, but the new model will devolve as much decision making as possible down the council organisation.

Andrew Burns said: "The people at the front line are going to have the authority just to authorise expenditure and get on with the job. But the bigger problem for me is that this is a culture change so it will not necessarily be easy to deliver to employees, unions and others. I am hopeful however that the trade unions will welcome this as it does not affect frontline employees as much as those in higher positions. In fact numerically, frontline positions should be enhanced."

This is just the next step in a long journey towards reshaping one of the largest public authorities in Scotland, and a further council report will be brought to the Corporate Strategy and Policy meeting in the spring. A consultation will be run with trade unions and others from the meeting next week if this policy is adopted by the council.

The council leader is hoping that front line service delivery will be much improved, with consequent fiscal benefit and a more responsive organisation. The Chief Executive Sue Bruce is adamant that the customer must be at the 'heart of organisational delivery'. Since that appears to be all of us we should perhaps be happy that this is happening. If it saves money at the same time then clearly it has twofold benefits.

But what of those who will lose their jobs? The council has a no compulsory redundancy position, so some jobs will simply become vacant as people leave in the normal course of their careers, and others may be offered 'enhanced voluntary redundancy'. At the present time around 6 or 7% of the council workforce leave or move on for a variety of reasons.

The council hopes to start the new processes in 2016/17 but there is some likelihood that parts of the new way of working will find their way into the council during the next financial

year which starts in spring 2015.

Staff will perhaps move more freely across departments and the report explains that career support and development for council employees will be a key part of the new regime.

The new regime will mean that new Chief Officer posts will require to be filled with other positions in the middle manager range being removed.

The consultation may mean that the recommendation adopted next week is eventually a combination of other suggestions in the report, but it will depend on the amount of interaction between the interested parties and the council at that time.

The financial implications must also be ratified by the council's Finance and Resources committee which meets on 15 January 2015.

All council consultations are on their website and you can see which ones are running at the present time by clicking [here](#).

The council's budget challenge will finish on 19 December and currently has had 1400 replies which is four times as many as last year.