

# Council reorganisation plans to cut costs and improve service



The idea behind the planned reorganisation of the way council departments provide their services is not all about cost cutting, instead it is about providing good customer service, but saving money will be one of the direct benefits.

It has to be as the council needs to find the balance of the £138m savings that it was faced with at the beginning of its period in office some two and a half years ago. It has already identified around half of those, but the real push will come in the latter part of the council's five year term when money is harder to find. It is simply not possible to carry on 'as is' since the council would not have the funds to do so.

Even though the council is pushing forward with large capital projects such as school building there is still a need to maintain frontline services while achieving savings needed to do this within a fixed budget which is not set to increase.



Convener of  
Finance and  
Resources Alasdair  
Rankin

The Finance Convener Councillor Alasdair Rankin is adamant that the changes will bring about at least enough savings in financial terms to allow them to produce a balanced budget in the next three years.

Councillor Rankin said:- “The council needs to take significant steps to tackle the financial challenges it faces as demand for our services continues to increase. At the same time we want to make services for residents more efficient and effective.

The Edinburgh Reporter talked to Councillor Rankin about the reorganisation plans:

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There will be some job losses, but the council promises that these will be contained within voluntary redundancy packages and some natural wastage. The Capital Coalition has a policy of no compulsory redundancy and so there will not be mass compulsory layoffs caused by the new structure.

There are discussions underway with Trade Unions about the way staff may be redeployed in different areas or where some staff might accept voluntary redundancy.

The detailed proposals which the council has published today are designed to ensure that the council becomes more customer focussed and efficient. One of the ways that it will deliver services to the public is by using the internet rather than face to face transactions. The saving here is obvious and enormous. To process a transaction on a face to face basis can cost the council as much as £30, whereas to put a process on the internet and essentially allow the public to use the self-service option costs only 3p.

The council plans concentrate on six distinct areas and one large section is devoted to improving the way the council works through its website to provide services. Almost 4 million customers contact the council each year to deal with everything from council tax queries to potholes, but they feel that more of their customers who are active online could be

encouraged to do so. They also feel that they could be offering a better online service and will spend money here to improve it and then save money in the long run. They estimate that the savings here could be as much as £5.3m in net terms.

As well as dealing with the public online they also want to ensure that the council's services are not duplicated or fragmented as they are at the moment. This will be achieved by moving council services into four localities and removing some of the tiers between the public and whoever it is in the council who can actually help them. This has the potential to save the council £11.5m over the next five years.

Moving council services into four separate localities is seen as a natural progression from the existing Neighbourhood Partnership model which has had some good feedback from the public. Now the potential to do more of this across the city and really localise services with proper levels of responsibility could mean savings of up to £21m over five years.

The plans will be discussed at the Finance committee next week at the City Chambers.