

# Planning for Change at the City Chambers

At next week's Finance Committee the councillors will approve sending out information and setting up an online consultation so that the public can learn about the council's finances and how they might work from now till 2023.

The council's revenue budget must be cut by £28 million in the next financial year, and by £106 million in the next five years. It has already made cuts of £240 million in the last six years.

The council's Finance Convener is keen that all residents become involved in the debate, or are at the very least informed about services the council provides, and help councillors decide where cuts might be made. Following a decision in August the council will inform and obtain feedback from people in Edinburgh about the way they will work over the next five years. This will be done with online and print publications to explain what they do and where savings might be made.

The document which the councillors must approve is called *Planning for Change and Delivering Services*. It is full of ideas, but deliberately omits any specific numbers when suggesting areas where change can be made.

The report is clear though in aiming to deal with the poverty which affects one in five children living in Edinburgh, of making the necessary savings and allowing everyone to share in the benefits of the successful capital city. There is low unemployment in Edinburgh, the prospect of the City Region Deal will bring £1.3 billion of investment in infrastructure projects to the capital and the surrounding council areas.

## SAVINGS

So with a revenue budget of around £1 billion the council's Finance Convener Alasdair Rankin said that they want to maximise income, maintain services and still achieve a balanced budget.

Rather than standing still, which Cllr Rankin says is not even an option, the council is looking further forward than just one year at a time, and will try to agree on what they believe to be necessary changes in the period to 2023.

The council is working on efficiency by continuing to strike the best deal with their suppliers, using digital technology to reduce overheads and keeping buildings in good order while 'optimising' the property that they own. This can mean selling or leasing land or buildings so that any liability that the council has is brought to an end. In recent times the council has leased off the former Lothian Chambers on George IV Bridge to the French Institute, and has rationalised some of its own buildings on the High Street.

## **ACTION**

The council intends using **prevention** in such a way that this will eventually feed through to council spending. For example, if people are healthier then they might not require the level of social care spending that the council has to find. This would have a particular effect on the social care budget, as one of the most pressing of the 22 areas of council spending is social care. The council runs this in partnership with the NHS, and with a growing older population the amount required continues to rise.

Dealing with homelessness is an expensive business, and the council will spend £45 million supporting those who are or are at risk of becoming homeless. 2,000 households are at present in temporary accommodation and these kind of delays must be reduced, as the costs spiral when the council has to step in. The number of homeless people has fallen by half in recent

years, but there are still around 3,000 in Edinburgh.

In this successful capital city the council is set to spend £600 million on new council homes in the next four years and says it wants to ensure that any investment benefits everyone living here.

By setting up bodies such as the Edinburgh Poverty Commission and the Homelessness Task Force the council is trying to use prevention as a way of reducing the cost of the cure. The council is actively looking at ways of reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and using alternatives.

Dealing with household waste has been a difficult area for the council and they are now building a new depot at Bankhead to mirror those at the new Seafield facility. Complaints and dissatisfaction have both reduced since 2017. Now they want to improve this so that it becomes a more reliable service

## **PROPOSALS**

What does the council propose?

There are many options for change set out in the report from increasing the use of digital services, to changing the way that council vehicles are maintained.

There is a recommendation that the council centralises its CCTV operation and that the police and Lothian Buses use the same centre, thus saving money and enabling slicker management of traffic and public spaces.

They will review any services which they are not bound to deliver under statute and see if there are any which can be shed, or delivered in a better more cost effective way. One of the non-statutory services is garden waste collection which the council imposed a £25 annual charge for earlier this year. This created a lot of criticism, but if further cuts are to be made then these are the areas where it could be easiest to

shave some overheads.

Parking zones may be extended and a workplace parking levy will be examined.

Simply by ensuring that the council collects all the council tax it is due is one way of improving its efficiency and cashflow, and they are asked to look at this.

Examining leisure services and museums and galleries are both mentioned in the report, not in the context of proposing closures, but in the context of reviewing the way these are delivered and used.

And finally, but it will be no surprise to you, there is mention of the Transient Visitor Levy which the council want to introduce. At present the Scottish Government has not yet said yes. There must be legislation to allow such a tax to be introduced which could raise at least £11 million a year.

Opportunities for income include raising fees for certain planning processes, including those where there will have to be roadworks. The council also wants to look at ways of raising more revenue from advertising where it owns suitable sites.

## **What do you think? You will soon be able to have your say on the council's [Consultation Hub](#)**

Finance and Resources Convener, Cllr Alasdair Rankin, said: "Like all local authorities, Edinburgh must prepare for the significant financial challenges that lie ahead. Meeting these challenges will require tough choices, which is why we need to embrace a forward thinking and ambitious change strategy.



Convener of  
Finance and  
Resources Alasdair  
Rankin

“Rather than making small annual reductions that over time become unsustainable, the Council needs to develop a longer term broad-minded plan that will see us through from now until 2022/23.

“This is a strategic response to the opportunities and challenges facing the capital now and in the future and will form the main basis for a plan for a more progressive city with increased opportunities and reduced inequality.

“Edinburgh is a successful city that has much to be proud of but, as a coalition, we are committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to share in that success.”

Finance and Resources Vice Convener, Cllr Marion Donaldson, added: “We are working hard to bring together proposals which will balance our budget whilst maximising investment in priority services and protecting vulnerable people. I want to be clear that no decisions have yet been made and we want to hear people’s views on our outline proposals.

“The public’s response to our engagements in recent years has been fantastic, with thousands of people sharing their views – all of which has allowed us to make more informed decisions when developing service plans and balancing our budgets.

"I would encourage everyone to play their part in the process once again and put forward their views whether that be by using our online planner, phone, letter, email, social media, or speaking with their local councillor. All feedback will be considered as part of the process and will inform our next steps."

