

Council's Change Strategy put on hold to allow time to talk to unions

The city council's staff restructuring strategy has been put on hold after two of the ruling coalition's councillors refused to back pressing ahead without more consultation with trade unions.

Conservative councillors on the Finance and Resources committee said the split in the administration's ranks "effectively amended the budget" that was agreed for 2019/20 last month. Andrew Kerr the Chief Executive of the council said later in the meeting that it was not possible for one committee to change the budget agreed by all 62 councillors in February.

This morning councillors agreed a two-month delay in implementing the council's Change policy after trade unions accused the authority of a "brutalist Job Centre Plus approach" to the strategy and called for "meaningful consultation". The committee listened to several deputations in the morning session from union representatives.

The council believes the new policy will allow consultations with staff to "focus more on mitigation of redundancy", rather than staff "often waiting weeks after consultation closes to know if they have secured a role or not". It is believed around 200 full time equivalent jobs will be cut in 2019/20 despite a no compulsory redundancy policy and the council did not set out any numbers in the budget finally agreed.

What is known is that the council needs to make savings of at least £147m over the next four years in its spending.

Green Cllr Claire Miller's amendment for a pause was set to fail, despite being backed by Conservative councillors. But Finance and Resources convener, Cllr Alistair Rankin, who wanted to press ahead with the policy, was defeated when SNP Cllr Kate Campbell and Labour Cllr Mandy Watt (both members of the minority coalition) abstained from the vote.



Councillor Kate Campbell Housing and Economy Convener Photo
The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Campbell, the council's housing and economy convener, had earlier spoken out about worries over communication and the proposed cuts to economic development. She said she felt "anxious" about the issue – while Cllr Watt said she had "completely lost the feel for where my responsibility sits" in the policy.

The council's head of Human Resources, Katy Miller, told councillors that staff involvement was "absolutely crucial". She added: "The driver for this policy is about involving them from the outset so they have a voice in Change."

Chief executive Andrew Kerr said: "There are a large number of issues embedded in the budget decision. If we delay this implementation then we are endangering getting full year savings.

"I don't think there's any choice for any of us that Change is going to continue to happen. There's nothing on the horizon that suggests that local government is going to be the bastion

of stability over the next few years.”

Conservatives criticised the SNP-Labour administration for including the Change strategy in its budget proposals, agreed last month, before being approved by the Finance and Resources committee.



Cllr Andrew Johnston

Tory Cllr Andrew Johnston said: “This should never have been in the budget. Councillors shouldn’t have to worry about doing the right thing because there’s a financial consequence.”

Conservative group leader, Cllr Iain Whyte, added: “A number of things have gone through the budget without any detail, with a fair bit of secrecy and no consultation. Now we are getting policies to implement the budget after we have agreed the budget.”

In tabling his failed bid to implement the policy, Cllr Rankin said: “There are financial consequences – I don’t feel that’s going to be helpful.

“It makes sense to approve a policy now and take account of what’s been said.”

After her amendment was passed, Cllr Miller said: “At a time when the council is having to change fast, it’s vital that the council recognises that our biggest asset is staff and staff need to feel their voice is heard.

“It’s now really important that the next 10 weeks is used productively to get round the table with trade union colleagues and come back with a policy that can be a solid foundation for future change.”

Today at Finance Committee Green councillor [@CllrCMiller](#) was able to argue successfully for a pause in workforce policy changes to allow further dialogue with [@unisonedin](#) and

[@UniteScotland](#). Two members of SNP-Labour coalition abstained meaning that the Green amendment passed.
[pic.twitter.com/WDtCgGovQU](#)

– Edinburgh Greens (@EdinburghGreens) [March 7, 2019](#)