

Budget communications and engagement 2011-12

The City of Edinburgh Council

24 June 2010

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the proposed Communications and Engagement Plan for the Council Budget 2011-12. It outlines the key aspects of a comprehensive programme of communication and engagement with stakeholders on the budget choices facing the Council.

2 Summary

- 2.1 In view of the serious nature and scale of the financial pressures facing the Council, it is proposed that a comprehensive and innovative communication programme is carried out to engage stakeholders in the budget decisions the Council will have to make. Since services may change significantly during the next five years, it is important that Edinburgh's citizens understand the impact these decisions are likely to have and that they are given the opportunity to communicate their priorities for Council expenditure.
- 2.2 The benefits of early engagement include:
- political and managerial advantages of communicating key elements of the decision-making process to the public;
 - management of public and staff expectation of the scale of the challenge;
 - improving the understanding of residents and tackling media/specialist interest group misinformation;
 - greater opportunity for the public's views to feed continuously into the decision making process; and
 - allowing an element of testing of alternative budget proposals.
- 2.3 A budget communications steering group has been set up to take this forward and I will ensure that elected members are kept informed on a regular basis about activity and outcomes.
- #### 3 Main report
- 3.1 A full engagement programme with the public and other stakeholders is now being planned to communicate the budget issues and challenges faced by the Council. This will include a variety of opportunities and methods to contribute to

the debate and early scene-setting activity is already under way through Edinburgh Outlook and with local media.

3.2 The key messages will reflect the local and national context and the development of the communications plan will take account of any future national campaign or activity from COSLA and other local government bodies.

3.3 The programme will include:

- a series of city and neighbourhood events and small road shows in August with elected members at the centre of the dialogue;
- a range of media, both printed and on-line, to consult and inform audiences, including use of Edinburgh Outlook, the council website and the Leader's report database;
- a similar programme using Magnet, the Orb and the cascade team briefing system Teamtalk, to communicate and encourage dialogue on budget issues with staff;
- ongoing discussion on budget issues with the trades unions and other relevant groups;
- a pro-active media plan with feature articles, planned announcements of critical decisions, consultation arrangements, as well as effective instant rebuttal of misinformation where appropriate;
- online questionnaires to seek views on service prioritisation, withdrawals and changes;
- a range of social media to encourage on-line budget conversation and debate with citizens, and also to engage with a younger audience;
- feedback from all these sessions being made available via the Council's new website which launches in October; and
- once the Council's budget has been agreed and set, follow up sessions, both face to face and online, explaining the key budget decisions made.

3.4 The tone of the programme will be about engagement and conversation, with direct face to face communication taking place wherever possible. The creative use of tools and resources will be employed to reach the widest audience in the most cost effective way.

3.5 A detailed and fully comprehensive communications and engagement plan is being finalised and will be made available to members. I will also ensure that elected members are regularly briefed.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There will be no significant expenditure associated with the programme. It is intended that the programme is carried out at minimal cost with in-house

resources being used and in-kind support being sought from city partners or businesses wherever possible.

5 Environmental Impact

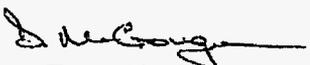
- 5.1 There are no adverse environmental impacts arising from this report. Electronic and face to face communication methods will be used wherever possible, minimising the need for printed materials.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 A considerable amount of work is already under way to deliver one of the most wide ranging budget communications and engagement programmes undertaken in Edinburgh.
- 6.2 It provides a valuable opportunity to create a model of city-wide engagement that is transferable to other issues and future budgets.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Council
- a) agrees that a major budget communication and engagement programme will be carried out; and
 - b) notes that I will keep elected members informed of the progress of the programme.


for **Tom Aitchison**
Chief Executive
15th June 2010

Appendices	None
Contact/tel/Email	Marjory Kenny Tel: 529 4426 E-mail: marjory.kenny@edinburgh.gov.uk
Wards affected	All
Single Outcome Agreement	National Outcome 15 - Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs
Background Papers	None