

PR 380

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Budget Savings Require Services Move from Penicuik Town Hall

In a bid to achieve over £40,000 worth of savings required by the recent Council Tax budget, Midlothian Council is to relocate administrative services from Penicuik Town Hall to their main centre in Dalkeith.

Following on from an efficiency review, the Council has concluded that with the range of preferred payment opportunities increasing and the much-reduced use of services made by customers to the Town Hall, the current cost of these services can no longer be afforded.

The Council however point out that it is only certain services located at Penicuik Town Hall which are relocating - the Town Hall will continue to be available for community use.

Council leader Adam Montgomery explains: "Since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act we have had to provide equality of access to services including access to buildings. The cost of making the services in Penicuik Town Hall fully compliant is £210,000 and this, together with the results of the efficiency review led us to conclude that retaining these services at this location did not offer the Council best value."

The principle services provided are revenues services including the payment of council tax, benefits enquiries etc. Over 60% of people now pay their council tax by direct debit and the telephone is the preferred customer choice to contact the Council to receive services. In certain circumstances, home visits to discuss council or housing benefit matters are offered. As well as direct debit, payments can be made at local outlets including post offices and Paypoint facilities.

The current Registrar service will move to Dalkeith at the end of March.

The District Court office will move to Buccleuch House in Dalkeith. The public service from this office relates mainly to the payment of fines and arrangements are made for this facility to transfer to Dalkeith. The District Court will continue to meet in Penicuik on Tuesdays, although an alternative venue is currently being sought.

Councillors Adam Montgomery, Keith McIntosh and David Fletcher, have issued the following joint statement:

"We want to make it clear that the relocation of services from Penicuik Town Hall is as a direct result of the large funding cuts to be imposed by the Scottish Executive from 1 April 2006. The financial situation is very tough and we expressed our serious concerns at the time of setting the budget. As a result, we need to make efficiency savings wherever possible.

As local councillors we understand and recognise the importance of the Town Hall to the community of Penicuik and have instructed the Estates section to undertake a study of how we can make the best use of this facility. The Town Hall remains, as always, available to the public for their use and enjoyment."

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