

# Publicity costs rise by 1,000% in decade

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Political Editor

THE city council has been criticised for the amount it spends on publicity.

Figures from the Taxpayers' Alliance, a Conservative think tank, ranked Nottingham's £3.7m spending on publicity in 2006/07 the 23rd highest among local authorities.

The Alliance also claimed the expenditure had increased more than 1,000% in the previous ten years. The total spending in 1996/97 was given as £318,000.

But the city council and its Labour leadership dismissed this comparison, pointing out that the council was a district authority until 1998, when it became unitary and independent of Notts County Council.

Defending the expenditure, Coun Michael Edwards, deputy leader of the council, said it had in 1998 taken on responsibility for a wider range of services, including education, social services and highways.

"We now put a lot more emphasis on information to the public and I think the public appreciate a lot of the information that goes out," he said.

Coun Edwards said it was important to let people know that good things were happening.

"We are taking the city



'DIFFERENT THEN':  
Coun Michael Edwards

places and we are working to give the Nottingham a sense of pride," said Coun Edwards.

Opposition groups on the council are worried about the amount spent on publicity - and how it is spent.

Coun Dick Benson, a spokesman for the Conservative Group, said there had been a significant increase in expenditure on "reputation"

Publicity should, he said, be used to promote services, not the council itself.

The District Auditor described as of "questionable lawfulness" banners in the city before the May elections.

The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrat group highlight the 40 or so staff working in the council's communications unit and Coun Gar Long, Lib-Dem leader has questioned whether they are value for money.

But Stephen Barker, the city council's head of communications, said the £3.7m spent included £1m on recruitment, as well as £1.5m on salaries.

"The Government and Local Government Association have said it is important councils communicate with customers," he said.

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IS THE COUNCIL  
RIGHT TO SPEND  
THIS MUCH MONEY  
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