



November 2015

### Budget Question Time



We are now midway through this year's [budget consultation](#) and I would like to thank the hundreds of you of who have already taken the time to have your say. If you haven't, there's still plenty of time to do so – the consultation runs until 10 December.

As part of this, and following the success of last year's event, we are running another '[Budget Question Time](#)' on 23 November in the City Chambers. This is designed to give you the opportunity to quiz our panel of senior councillors on the Council's budget proposals for next year and beyond.

The proceedings will be chaired by Scotsman and Evening News Managing Editor, Frank O'Donnell, and broadcast live via the Council website.

If you would like to put a question to the panel, or just come along and be part of the audience, please [register online](#) by next Thursday, 19 November. We are allocating places on a first come, first served basis.

This is a great opportunity to play your part in Edinburgh's budget challenge.

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### NPS crackdown

I am delighted that the Council has become a leading local authority in the battle against dangerous NPS – Novel Psychoactive Substances.

Trading Standards officers from the Council were the first in Scotland to be granted Forfeiture Orders from the Sheriff Court declaring NPS products – incorrectly known as "legal highs" – as unsafe. Officers used the orders to target 13 stores, eight of which have now voluntarily handed over their stock of NPS to Trading Standards. These products, which have a retail value of up to £50,000, will now be destroyed.

It is encouraging to hear that a number of other Scottish local authorities are now following our lead and considering how best to adopt this approach.

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### Seven cities convention

Earlier today I joined Deputy First Minister John Swinney at the Scottish Government's Cities Convention in Perth to speak of the importance of Scotland's seven cities and their regions to the country.

The cities contribute 60% of Scottish economic activity, almost £69 billion, while supporting 54% of the country's employment. The cities and their regions will be crucial to delivering prosperity and tackling inequalities. In order to do this effectively and in the most efficient manner, we need greater control over policy and fiscal matters to allow us to create the right environment

The event was very productive and I'm looking forward to on-going discussions with the Scottish and UK Governments on ways in which the cities and their regions can help deliver a more prosperous and fairer Scotland.

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### Growing in confidence

It may surprise you to know that mental health issues affect one in ten young people. It's an area that often doesn't get much publicity so many congratulations to the Council's Mental Health & Wellbeing Team for winning the Education Initiative of the Year at the [Herald Society Awards](#).

Their *Growing Confidence* Secondary School Programme aims to support secondary schools to better promote good mental health in staff, pupils and families. Many of them have gone on courses and delivered training and 21 out of 25 secondary schools have actively taken part in the programme since its launch two years ago.

Good mental health allows children and young people to flourish, develop resilience and cope better with stress. A very worthwhile project and well done to the team on the award.

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### A bright future for solar cooperative

I have joined hundreds of other 'sustainable investors' by registering to buy shares in the [Edinburgh Community Solar Cooperative](#) which, thanks to more than £500,000 of investment, is set to become the UK's largest community-owned urban solar farm.

Community energy co-operatives allow local people to play a part in building a greener, more sustainable environment whilst raising awareness more generally about the importance of being energy efficient.

We are aiming to meet our target of reducing Edinburgh's carbon emissions by 42% by 2020 and this project is an important step towards achieving this. The offer closes on 1<sup>st</sup> December.

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## Edinburgh in Bloom

What does Edinburgh have in common with Milan and Gothenburg? At a prestigious ceremony in Malmo last week, all three cities were named worthy winners of the [2015 EUROCITIES awards](#).

Recognised for innovation and community participation, I'm pleased to say Edinburgh's outstanding entry was for our '[Edinburgh in Bloom](#)' initiative. The project works with partners, volunteers and organisations from all over the city to keep our parks clean, green and looking good.

The EUROCITIES awards are selected by an independent jury and consider projects from all over Europe. It's a fantastic achievement and proves our city has some of the finest green spaces (and green-fingered workers) in Europe.

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## Greg Ward

After almost eight years, our Director of Economy and City Strategy, Greg Ward, is to take up a role with Westminster City Council.

From our Edinburgh Guarantee programme for school leavers to critical investment for the Edinburgh St James development, the Council's impressive economic development service helps to support business growth, inward investment and local employment opportunities. This has been helped in no small part by Greg's leadership and dedication.

Just last month, our [economy watch](#) figures revealed the number of businesses operating in the Capital has risen by 19.2% year-on-year, while Job Seekers Allowance claims continue to decline – now sitting at just 1.2%.

Greg leaves us on 30 November and we thank him for his dedication while wishing him well as he takes on this new challenge.

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