



March 2016

### Ensuring best value for Edinburgh



Last month I welcomed a report by Audit Scotland, which demonstrated just how far the Council has come over the last year to address its financial challenges.

The [Audit of Best Value 2016](#) recognised the Council's strategy for changing the way it delivers vital services while making necessary savings against an increasingly tough financial climate.

This was confirmed in a further report by the Accounts Commission last week, in which they highlighted the Council's four-year budget framework and strong leadership by elected members and officers.

Setting the budget involved some of the toughest decisions of my 17 years in local government but, in difficult circumstances, we aimed to prioritise those services that mattered most to Edinburgh residents. I am confident that we are now in a stronger position to meet the challenges ahead.

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### A new Meadowbank

Ever since 1970, when it played host to Scotland's first Commonwealth Games, Meadowbank has served residents and professional athletes well. And while it is still a much loved facility, with over half a million users every year, it is now close to 50 years old and its facilities are tired.

A report being considered by councillors next week outlines the investment required to transform the current venue into a sports centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Obviously this would involve significant investment for the Council but having a detailed design gives us greater clarity about how much money we need to find.

A new Meadowbank would better serve the sporting needs of the local community as well as the surrounding region with facilities for physical activity, health and wellbeing. In addition, the surplus land available would allow hundreds of new affordable homes to be built on the site, contributing to the city's housing needs.

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### Edinburgh St James

The Edinburgh St James development is set to take another important step forward with the Council, Scottish Government and TH Real Estate, the developer, finalising the details of an innovative funding package.

Known as the Growth Accelerator Model (GAM), it will fund essential public realm improvements to the Picardy Place area and has been key to helping unlock £850m of private sector investment at the heart of our city centre.

Not only will it provide much needed premium retail space for the city, it will also contain 250 new homes, 30 restaurants, a multi-screen cinema and a 5 star, world class hotel – creating 1,000 jobs in the process. We anticipate demolition will begin this May with an expected completion date of 2020.

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### Yet more awards

Edinburgh has been named one of [Europe's best cities to do business](#), having been crowned a winner in the annual fDi (foreign direct investment) awards chosen by the Financial Times Group.

The win is no surprise considering Edinburgh remains a highly attractive place to do business. Indeed, the Council's work to build relationships with other global cities was cited by the panel as a key driver for foreign direct investment into the Capital. I'm glad to see the success of the sector – and the part played by the Council – isn't going unnoticed.

There was further good news for the city when it was named one of the [world's most beautiful cities](#), and who could disagree? We were beaten only by Paris, Florence and Rome in a Rough Guide poll of its readers.

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### Be Able

I recently visited the excellent Be Able Service, part of a registered day care service for Older People in Drumbrae, and was delighted to hear that a similar service is set to open in Oxfords. This has been long planned and will meet a gap in current provision within the area.

Be Able works with older people over a period of 14-16 weeks to improve mobility, regain and increase their confidence doing every day activities such as getting out and about and preparing a meal to help them remain living at home for as long as possible. It also offers support to people with the earlier stages of dementia.

The service has had fantastic feedback from users in other areas of the city. You can learn more about what they do by [watching their short video](#).

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## ESCo incorporated

Late last year, some of the largest organisations in the city pledged their support to our [Sustainable Energy Action Plan](#) (SEAP), which aims to transform our energy use by reducing demand and encouraging local generation – the first plan of its kind in Edinburgh.

It's great news, then, that we're now taking the next step with the creation of our energy service company (ESCo). This will be wholly owned by the Council and have a key remit for delivering the strategic energy projects from the Plan.

The development of energy projects will be crucial to its success and work is already underway to identify projects across three areas of: energy efficiency; district heating and renewables. The hope is that it could become self sustaining – delivering real environmental and economic benefits for the city.

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