



Winter weather response

The last of the snow may have melted away but I'm sure the memory of the recent blast of winter weather is still fresh in most people's minds. After days of snow, ice and freezing temperatures battering the Capital and further afield, it was a relief to see things returning to normal earlier this week.

That our services returned to business as usual so quickly is testament to the hard work and professionalism of staff from across the Council, who went above and beyond the call of duty to keep the city moving over this challenging period. From the care staff who battled the elements to provide support to some of the city's most vulnerable people to the gritting teams working round the clock to clear pavements and routes for the public to use, I want to [thank them for their dedication](#).

I'm also extremely grateful for the support of families, community groups and businesses who pitched in to shovel snow, clear school playgrounds and paths, grit local pavements and visit older and disabled neighbours throughout the snowy spell. Their help was vital in neighbourhoods around the city, meaning we could focus on providing essential services.

A responsible and caring budget

I was delighted to have passed our first budget of this administration last month; a budget with a real and determined focus on reducing inequality and protecting the most vulnerable members of our city.

In the year ahead, there will be [significant additional investments](#) in roads, health and social care, homelessness and improving school buildings. Continued investment will also be made in the services people have told us are important to them such as education, waste and recycling and services for residents most in need.

One of the most important aspects of the budget-setting process has been listening to the public and, thanks to your feedback, we have been able to make decisions such as keeping the Night Noise Team, an improved settlement for Edinburgh Leisure and offering exemptions on paying for garden waste collections.

This budget does three very important things: it invests in core services, it addresses our long-standing and most difficult challenges and it helps us all towards meeting our aspirations for this great city.

Calmer and more attractive streets

Our vision of Edinburgh as a pleasant and attractive city to get around and spend time in has had two major boosts this month. Firstly, we concluded our 18-month [rollout of 20mph](#), making us officially the first 20mph city in Scotland.

Calmer speeds make our roads better for everyone who uses them – it encourages more of us to walk and cycle because we feel safer doing so and it helps build community cohesion because people feel more comfortable out and about in their street when traffic speeds and noise are reduced. Thanks to a change in driver behaviour, accidents have already fallen by a quarter with a third less serious collisions.

Secondly, we were delighted to welcome hugely respected place-making and transport expert, Daisy Narayanan, to the helm of the Central Edinburgh Transformation project. A Deputy Director at Sustrans Scotland with a wealth of knowledge and experience, Daisy will play a pivotal role in our work to improve our public realm in the heart of Edinburgh and make it as accessible and appealing as possible.

Tram to Newhaven: your views

Very much with the above in mind, we are due to take final decision later this year on whether or not to take trams down to Newhaven. When we approved the [Outline Business Case](#) last September, we pledged to build strong relationships with the local communities who would be most affected by the project.

We've already established a valuable dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, including community groups and local traders, who have helped us develop our current proposals for the work that would be needed if the project goes ahead, such as traffic management and support for businesses.

From 19 March, we'll begin the first in a series of public consultations aimed at shaping the way we would carry out the works. We're keen to hear from as many people as possible so that we can understand and respond to their needs and concerns, whether that's about how their commute will be affected during construction, how their business can be helped or how the finished road layout might look and function.

Alongside this, it was refreshing to see the results of a recent independent survey carried out in Leith, showing that [the majority of respondents believe the area would benefit from the introduction of a tram](#).

Open, transparent, accountable

Having published our '[Programme for the Capital](#)' last summer, we then took a report to Council with a view to agreeing a framework for how best to implement this and, since then, much more work has been done to define, as far as possible, measurable actions and performance indicators for the 52 commitments.

I'm glad our Corporate Policy & Strategy committee had the opportunity to scrutinise this in more detail last month and that every commitment now has either a smart measure in place or timeline agreed of when one will be identified through the relevant executive committee.

We want our policies and decisions, and the reasons behind them, to be as open and transparent as possible. Just as we want to be accountable to the results.

New Chief Officer

Of course, a number of these commitments relate to 'delivering a healthier city for all ages' and, over the past few months, the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB) has been busy recruiting a new Chief Officer and Director of the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership. I'm pleased this process has now come to a successful conclusion with the [appointment of Judith Proctor](#), approved by the Board on 2 March.

Currently Chief Officer of Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership, Judith will bring extensive and valuable experience at a time when the Partnership faces many challenges and opportunities. I am confident she is an excellent choice to take on the wide-ranging and immensely challenging role working with stakeholders across the city to deliver vital services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Michelle Miller for her valuable contribution during her time as interim Chief Officer and wish her a long and happy retirement from the Council.

Museum of Childhood delights

Since 1955, a visit to the [Museum of Childhood](#) has provided Edinburgh families and tourists with the chance to reminisce and discover a treasure trove of toys from Scotland's past. Now, in its first major upgrade in 30 years, I'm pleased to see doors re-open today (9 March) following a £200,000 refit.

With a welcoming new display and a colourful 'building blocks' design, the refurbished floor will feature interactive exhibits tracking changing childhoods and a dressing-up area will offer children the chance to play as they learn.

With over 225,000 visitors every year, it really is one of Edinburgh's flagship venues and a favourite with locals as well as visitors. I'm particularly pleased its opening hours – and those of our other city centre museums and galleries – will be increased later this year thanks to our budget commitment last month.

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