

# Council Questions and Answers

## City of Edinburgh Council

10.00 am Thursday, 4th February, 2021

Virtual Meeting - via Microsoft Teams

### Questions and Answers

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# Agenda Annex

## Item no 10.1

### QUESTION NO 1

**By Councillor Laidlaw for answer by the Convener of the Education, Children and Families Committee at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021**

#### Question

- (1) Does the Convener agree with the statement 'High school examinations are an out-of-date 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century technology operating in a 21<sup>st</sup> century environment of teaching and learning'?

#### Answer

- (1) The statement is found on page 14 of the International Council of Education Advisers Second Formal Report of 2018-20 to the Scottish Government, published 17 December 2020. The ICEA report as a body to the Scottish Government, offering advice on Scotland's education system. The first Higher examination diet in Scotland was in 1888 so it is entirely correct to refer to their usage since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to present day. The issue of whether high school examinations are "out-of-date" is the matter of much current debate.

#### Question

- (2) Does he agree headteachers should 'seize the opportunity presented by the decision to cancel the exams to reshape assessment and moderation'?

#### Answer

- (2) Following the decision to cancel all SQA examinations for session 2020-21, all Head Teachers are required to ensure that there are robust systems in place to allow teachers, learners, parents and carers to have confidence in grades which will be set by teachers themselves. High quality assessment and moderation lies at the heart of such confidence, and this applies to the Broad General Education (Early years to S3) as well as the Senior Phase (S4-S6). See for example the Education Scotland document "The Moderation Cycle" at <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/the-moderation-cycle/> . We expect Head Teachers to be aware that improving

practice and confidence in this area is an essential part of improving attainment for all of our learners. We therefore would expect Head Teachers to appreciate that the decision to cancel examinations does present them with an opportunity to support staff to improve in this area, and that this is an opportunity which they should take.

**Question** (3) Does he agree with the statement 'issues of high-stakes end-loaded one-off exams in S4, S5 and S6 despite very low leaving rate in S4. Not fit for purpose'?

**Answer** (3) The statement is found in the "response" section of a document containing Head Teacher questions. The question in full is:

*'High school examinations are an out-of-date 19th and 20th century technology operating in a 21st century environment of teaching and learning' (International Council of Education Advisors 2020)*

*How will you seize the opportunity presented by the decision to cancel the exams to reshape assessment and moderation in Trinity Academy?*

The statement is given as a possible response. Again, there is much current debate about examination structures in Scottish education, with concerns of an overload of an assessment in the Senior Phase leading to stress for our learners. Concerns over a "two-term dash" to Highers in S5 remain, due to pupils sitting National 5 examinations in S4. We would expect our Head Teachers to have knowledge of the challenges facing Scottish education and to be able to question whether current arrangements are suitable or can be improved.

However, the statement was included for illustrative purposes and is not designed to be interpreted as the settled opinion of the council.

**Question** (4) Does he feel these are appropriate as a question presented to headteachers in their final short-leet interviews.

**Answer** (4) We expect our Head Teachers to be intellectually curious, willing to challenge the thinking of others (and themselves), and not be afraid to voice their own opinions. We also expect them to be aware of current developments in education, and to be able to express their views on them. The question was appropriate.

## Item no 10.2

### QUESTION NO 2

**By Councillor Jim Campbell for  
answer by the Convener of the  
Transport and Environment  
Committee at a meeting of the  
Council on 4 February 2021**

#### **Question**

What comfort can the Convener provide that the emptying of communal waste bins between the hours of 06:00 and 22:00 seven days a week, as set out in policy approved by the Transport and Environment Committee, is consistent with Noise Pollution legislation and the Councils own policy on Noise?

#### **Answer**

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 does not include specific time constraints on noise and any concern raised needs to be considered based on the facts of the case.

The waste collection service generally operates between the hours of 6am and 10pm (with a nightshift in the city centre) and, where collections commence before 7am or after 7pm these may result in complaints from residents about short term disturbance.

However, due to the short duration and frequency of these collections, experience has shown that they generally do not constitute a noise nuisance and therefore are not a breach of the legislation.

However, where complaints or enquiries are received from affected residents Environmental Health will, where appropriate, work with Waste and Cleansing teams to nevertheless explore whether steps can be taken to minimise any disturbance.

## Item no 10.3

### QUESTION NO 3

**By Councillor Webber for answer by the Convener of the Transport and Environment Committee at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021**

Given the recent Edinburgh Evening News Article of 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021 reported that the Council had only received 2 official complaints about the scheme since it was originated in May, 2020, can the Convener please clarify:

**Question** (1) What is the recognised complaints process for the public and Councillors to follow?

**Answer** (1) The Council's [Complaints Procedure](#) is described on the website.

**Question** (2) What records are maintained to evidence the complaints lodged, recorded and responded to?

**Answer** (2) All correspondence received in the Spaces for People mailbox has been categorised by theme and individual project and treated as objections (in a similar way to responses received for Traffic Regulation Orders).

Recently there have been a number of formal complaints received and these are being logged, acknowledged and dealt with at the appropriate stage of the Council's complaints process. However, due the number of complaints received recently it has not been possible to respond to all of the stage 1 complaints within the appropriate timeframe. These will, however, all be dealt with.

**Question** (3) How were complaints raised with Councillors which were forwarded to Spaces for People staff registered and recorded?

a) How were these complaints classified?

b) How many items of correspondence by email and letter have been received by officers in relation to concerns, issues, areas of improvement needed since the introduction of Spaces for People schemes?

**Answer**

- (3)** a) See Answer 2 above.
- b) There have been in excess of 5,000 items of correspondence of various types received by officers in respect of Spaces for People measures.

## Item no 10.4

### QUESTION NO 4

**By Councillor Webber for answer by the Convener of the Finance and Resources Committee at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021**

On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 the “Colleague Guide to Working from Home” was circulated and within this there was a link to “Display Screen Guidance”, “Display Screen Equipment Assessment” and a “Workstation Assessment at home Flow Chart”.

Given that most of our employees have been working from home, in often challenging situations since March 2020, can the convener confirm:

**Question** (1) How many Workstation Assessments were carried out?

**Answer** (1) See below.

**Question** (2) How many Display Screen Equipment Assessments were carried out?

**Answer** (2) **Q1 and Q2**

The Council’s assessment methodology follows the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) model inasmuch as workplace assessment and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) are interchangeable terms. DSE assessment is a self-assessment process. This approach means that overall numbers of completed DSE assessments are not collated or recorded centrally.

**Question** (3) What were high level recommendations from these assessments?

**Answer** (3) The high-level findings from DSE self-assessments generally related to the provision of equipment to enable individuals to work more effectively from home.

In a small number of more complex assessment outcomes this resulted in specialist equipment being supplied to home addresses and with the involvement of Occupational Health professional advice. An additional safeguard was also put in place if adjustments could not be made in response to DSE

self-assessments, or individual mental health and wellbeing issues, for line managers to seek to authorise a return to work. Such requests were carefully managed and have been very limited to date. Such access has also been reviewed regularly in light of changing public health guidance and associated restrictions.

- Question** (4) What equipment/solutions were provided to employees to ensure their working conditions at home met the Display Screen Guidance?
- Answer** (4) The individual needs of employees were met by the supply of equipment from the workplace to their home. The main items supplied included: chairs; desks; monitors; and, peripherals such as keyboards. The provision of such equipment has enabled employees to have adjustable seating, improved posture, correct desk height and distancing from monitors, etc.
- Question** (5) How long did staff need to wait until they were provided with the suitable equipment?
- Answer** (5) The timescale varied between individuals, given that this was wholly dependent upon the completion of the DSE self-assessment by employees, engagement with the line manager and the complexity of any identified requirements to be fulfilled. However, following identification of a need, a system was organised by Property and Facilities Management to enable rapid delivery or collection of equipment. A significant number of items were dispatched from Council premises in response to these assessments.
- Question** (6) How many outstanding requests are there and what is the nature of these?
- Answer** (6) There are no outstanding requests currently registered.
- Question** (7) What has been the financial cost of the required modifications, equipment and health and wellbeing support to members of staff who have been working from home?
- Answer** (7) These costs are not managed corporately, with any additional costs being contained within individual service budgets. However, the majority of the equipment supplied was existing office equipment and, consequently, additional costs have been minimised significantly.

## Item no 10.5

### QUESTION NO 5

**By Councillor Webber for answer by the Convener of the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021**

Following the announcement of the lockdown on 4<sup>th</sup> January and the previous suspension of repairs on 26<sup>th</sup> December how many tenants have outstanding non-essential repairs to their council homes? And can they be broken down by:

**Question** (1) How many requests for repairs have been made since March 2020?

**Answer** (1) Since March 2020 there have been 51,947 repair requests were made. Of these, 38,004 were classed as essential repairs, 4,002 were requests for non-essential repairs between March and October when these could not be carried out, and 9,941 were for non-essential repairs raised between October and December 2020 when non-essential repairs could be carried out.

**Question** (2) How many of these requests were deemed urgent?

**Answer** (2) As set out above, 38,004 requests were considered essential.

**Question** (3) How many of these requests have resulted in works on site?

**Answer** (3) All of the 38,004 requests for essential repair have resulted in works on site. Not all of the 9,941 non-essential repairs booked will have resulted in works being carried out on site.

**Question** (4) Can you confirm the procedure for tenants to follow for repairs that are not deemed urgent?

**Answer** (4) For those tenants who had non-essential repairs cancelled as a result of the introduction of the level 4 restrictions from 26 December 2020, the Council will contact them when these repairs can be safely carried out. The tenant will be asked to contact Repairs Direct to book a new appointment.

When the Council is again able to carry out non-essential repairs, this will be communicated to all tenants through our

normal communication channels, providing details on how to contact Repairs Direct to request repairs

**Question** (5) Based on historic information, or other sources, what backlog of repair work do you anticipate has built up as a result of the pandemic?

**Answer** (5) We anticipate that around 80% of the 1,600 non-essential repairs which had to be cancelled will be requested over the initial four week period when work can begin again on non-essential repairs.

Following the reintroduction of non-essential repairs in October 2020 analysis showed that requests for repair appointments were lower than the same period the previous year with just under 2,600 compared to around 3,400 the previous year over a five week period from October to November.

Feedback points to a number of reasons for this lower demand including tenants, particularly those shielding, not requesting repairs unless absolutely essential.

**Question** (6) What plans can you share for completing any outstanding work, and over what timescale?

**Answer** (6) The service plans to reinstate non-essential repairs on a safe and phased basis when Scottish Government Guidance allows, and it is safe to do so.

In addition to continuing to prioritise essential repairs, those tenants that had non-essential repairs cancelled in January 2021 will be given priority for appointments.

All other non-essential repair appointments will be scheduled as soon as possible, while ensuring that the service is not overwhelmed.

However, based on experience from October 2020, it is anticipated that all appointments will be completed within four weeks of being reported.

There is some risk that demand could be higher than it was when non-essential repairs were reintroduced previously. To mitigate this the service has a framework of contractors who

can provide additional temporary capacity if required. In addition, the HRA Business Plan includes a number of contingencies to fund additional revenue expenditure and loss of income which could be utilised if required to support this approach.

## Item no 10.6

### QUESTION NO 6

By Councillor Lang for answer by the Convener of the Transport and Environment Committee at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021

**Question** (1) How many grit bin refill requests were made between 1 December 2020-15 January 2021, broken down by ward?

**Answer**

(1)

WARD	NO. OF REFILL REQUESTS
01- ALMOND	291
02 - PENTLAND HILLS	306
03 - DRUM BRAE/GYLE	174
04 - FORTH	18
05 - INVERLEITH	84
06 - CORSTORPHINE/MURRAYFIELD	87
07 - SIGHTHILL/GORGIE	63
08 - COLINTON/FAIRMILEHEAD	337
09 - FOUNTAINBRIDGE/CRAIGLOCKHART	117
10 - MEADOWS MORNINGSIDE	88
11 - CITY CENTRE	13
12 - LEITH WALK	20
13 - LEITH	3
14 - CRAIGENTINNY/DUDDINGSTON	20
15 - SOUTHSIDE/NEWINGTON	57
16 - LIBERTON/GILMERTON	136
17 - PORTOBELLO/CRAIGMILLAR	35
NO CODE ALLOCATED	3
	1,852

Please note that, of the 1,852 requests received, only 896 were identified with a specific grit bin reference to allow the request to be formally recorded and tracked.

As well as the Council's Road Operations team, additional support to refill grit bins has been provided by other Council services (e.g. Street Cleansing and Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries) since January 2021. Work completed by other services is recorded manually and therefore may not yet be included in the information provided below.

There are 3,000 grit bins around Edinburgh for which the

Council is responsible. Complaints or requests may also be received about grit bins that are the responsibility of others, including developers of newer housing developments.

**Question** (2) What was the average time taken to fulfil grit bin refill requests made between 1 December 2020-15 January 2021?

**Answer** (2) The average time taken to refill the 896 grit bins was eight days.

**Question** (3) How many of the grit bin refill requests made between 1 December 2020-15 January 2021 were

- a) fulfilled within 7 days?
- b) fulfilled within 14 days?
- c) fulfilled within 21 days?
- d) still outstanding after 21 days?

**Answer** (3) For the 896 requests:

- a) 460 (51%) were fulfilled within 7 days;
- b) 297 (757 cumulative or 84%) were fulfilled within 14 days;
- c) 121 (878 cumulative or 98%) were fulfilled within 21 days;
- d) 18 (896 cumulative) are still outstanding.

**Question** (4) What performance target exists for responding to grit bin refill requests?

**Answer** (4) There are no performance targets for responding to grit bin refill requests.

It is worth noting that in times of snow fall, ice or prolonged cold replenished grit bins can be emptied very quickly. In these instances it is far more efficient to undertake a full

replenishment of all bins rather than try to attend only the ones that have been reported, which could lead to residents feeding back that only one bin (that has been reported) being refilled when there are others that are empty in the same or neighbouring street.

## Item no 10.7

### QUESTION NO 7

**By Councillor Lang for answer by the Convener of the Transport and Environment Committee at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021**

#### **Question**

What is the current timetable for implementing new parking restrictions on Almondhill Road following the Council's consultation on TRO/19/88 in December 2019?

#### **Answer**

TRO/19/88 related to the introduction of proposed double yellow lines on Kilmorey Place, Kirkliston.

Following issue of the first consultation letters comments were received from local elected members relating to the introduction of additional restrictions in Almondhill Road. After discussion with elected members it was agreed to withdraw the original TRO and to consult on a new plan for both Kilmorey Place and Almondhill Road.

This will be submitted in February 2021 and a new TRO process will commence as soon as possible after that.

## Item no 10.8

### QUESTION NO 8

**By Councillor Staniforth for answer  
by the Convener of the Housing,  
Homelessness and Fair Work  
Committee at a meeting of the  
Council on 4 February 2021**

#### Question

What is the estimated impact of Brexit on the economy of the city of Edinburgh?

#### Answer

There aren't any up to date forecasts of the economic impact of Brexit at a local authority level that take full account of the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) approved and then ratified by the UK parliament on December 30 that I am aware of.

However, in November 2020, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published a range of forecasts outlining the potential impacts of Brexit on the UK economy under different scenarios. Under the assumption of a 'typical' free-trade agreement (FTA) with the EU and a smooth transition to these new trading arrangements, OBR estimates the economic impact of the UK leaving the EU as a 4% loss of GDP over the long term compared with remaining in the EU.

This estimate is in line with the average of projections published by other institutions, with drivers of long-term output loss associated and driven by changes to trading arrangements, to supply chains, to tourism and investment flows, to cost and availability of labour, and consequent productivity changes.

In this context, it is reasonable to assume that, along with Covid-19 and the associated economic recession, Brexit represents a significant change in the economic environment within which the city operates, though the precise changes in activity and jobs directly associated with Brexit in the city remain challenging to estimate with confidence.

Although Edinburgh has strength and resilience through its diverse economy, that also means that there are many aspects of Brexit that could impact on different areas of the economy. Key risks are:

### **Exports**

Recent analysis from the Fraser of Allander Institute does note that cities such as Edinburgh may be less likely than other parts of the UK to be severely affected by export and trading related disruptions. However, sectors in Edinburgh with the highest proportion of output supported by EU exports include:

- some forms of manufacturing such as those related to computer/electronic,
- food and beverage,
- services for transport and storage

These collectively accounted for around 50,000 Edinburgh jobs in 2019.

Scottish Enterprise's *Fortnightly Insights* report noted that:

28% of Scottish exporters trading were exporting less than normal this week.

Trade with Northern Ireland (NI) has become much more difficult with challenges concentrated in food and drink businesses.

Many businesses fear rising costs – e.g. freight container use costs have quadrupled in recent months due to COVID-19 and Brexit.

Some of these costs are making certain business models unviable:

- businesses whose model involves goods crossing two borders (e.g. importing from China before selling to Europe) may have insufficient profit margins to absorb the double payment of import duty now required.
- businesses exporting directly to EU consumers report losing as much as a third of their customer

base overnight as new regulations (e.g. imposition of VAT, import tariffs) makes their products/services uncompetitive.

Market access issues are being reported in the new trading environment:

- A few businesses are currently unable to deliver to the EU as some couriers are not shipping because of the additional bureaucracy. Some EU-based hauliers have also stopped carrying goods to and from the UK.
- Some sales agents in Europe have indicated they are unwilling to take on additional UK work as they are not paid any additional fees to cover the extra bureaucracy and only get paid once orders have been delivered and paid for. This is particularly a problem for smaller businesses.

## **Construction**

The Construction Leadership Council estimates that around 22% of all materials, products and components are sourced from abroad by UK construction businesses. Provided that rules of origin are satisfied in relation to the goods there will be no tariffs under the TCA. However, customs declarations need to be made when importing or exporting goods which could result in supply chain delays.

In addition the TCA does not provide for mutual recognition of products or standards in the same way as existed while the UK was in the EU. From 2022 businesses must make sure that any products or components they use, imported from the EU, have a third party conformity assessment by an approved body.

The end of free movement also creates an increased likelihood of a skills shortage which could have an impact on delivery timescales for construction projects, increase costs and could make some projects unaffordable.

## **Inward Investment**

Also noted in Scottish Enterprise's *Fortnightly Insights* report:

- Evidence is also emerging that inward investors have a less positive outlook on the Scottish economy than indigenous businesses as they had greater, and growing, concern over the end of the transition period with the EU.

## **Financial Services**

In 2019 Financial Services and Insurance accounted for 10.5% of jobs in Edinburgh. Many firms anticipated the end of passporting and have adjusted to mitigate the impact. However, the TCA has very limited provision for financial services, instead a joint declaration sets out that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be agreed by March 2021 alongside a commitment to further dialogue. While it is hoped that this will give a greater degree of certainty over the future agreements that will be in place, there is currently no clarity on how this dialogue will proceed, and what impact it may have on the EU's current equivalence framework.

The EU is also expected to, but not guaranteed to, grant the UK data adequacy. Until this is has been granted there is a risk to businesses that transfer personal data from the EU.

The exact nature and scale of the impact of Brexit on Edinburgh's economy will be difficult to estimate because of the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Analysis from the Fraser of Allander Institute identified the top three sectors where Scottish output fell the most due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The change in sector GDP between February and September 2020 was -31% for the accommodation and food industry, -20% for other services (e.g. repair services, hairdressing and other beauty treatments) and -14% for transport and storage. Edinburgh has a higher share of jobs in these sectors with 14.9% jobs in Edinburgh versus 14.1% jobs in Scotland as recorded in 2019.

While we do not have precise data on the scale of the impact of Brexit on Edinburgh, from the data that is available we can estimate the sectors that are likely to be most impacted, and the nature of the challenges that will arise.

An assessment of these issues and appropriate responses will be considered during development of the refreshed Edinburgh Economy Strategy planned for publication this year, with reports due for consideration by the Policy and Sustainability Committee in April and June 2021.

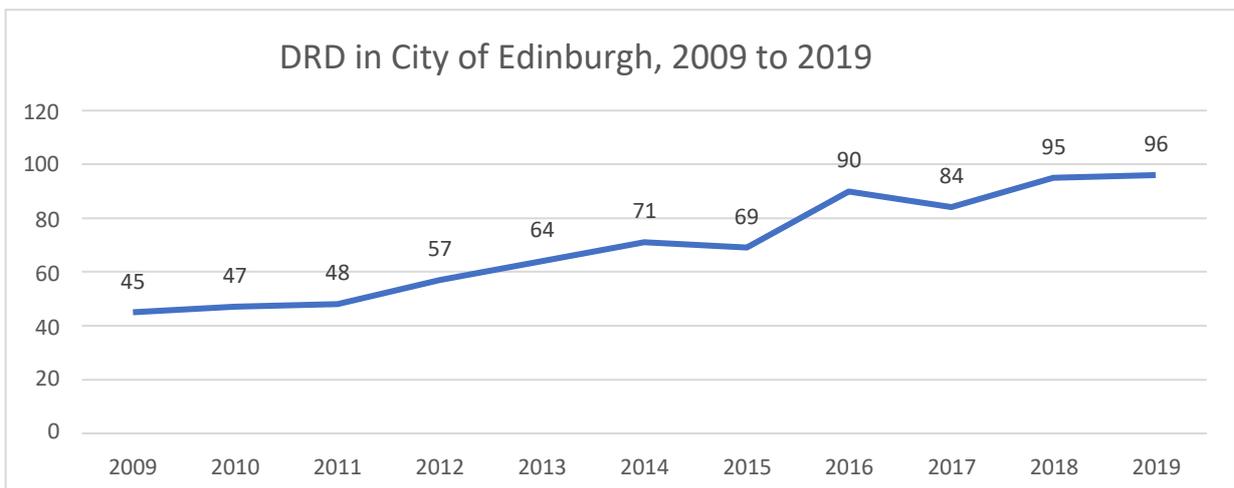
**QUESTION NO 9**

**By Councillor Main for answer by the Vice Chair of the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board at a meeting of the Council on 4 February 2021**

The Scottish Government recently announced additional funding over a five year period to tackle Scotland’s disgraceful record on drug deaths.

**Question** (1) How many drug deaths and drug related deaths have there been in Edinburgh and what is the known about the profile of those deaths over the last 10 years?

**Answer** (1) The graph below provides the figures for drug related deaths since 2009. Local analysis indicates several trends which may be contributing to the increase: Increasing proportions of those who died had taken cocaine or other stimulants, either alongside other drug types or on their own. This is a particular risk factor for older drug users or those who have had long periods of substance use. Similarly, benzodiazepines were involved in a greater proportion of the deaths. There are some other changes in age range and gender profile.



**Question** (2) Over the last 5 years what has been the total funding offered by the Scottish Government and what has been the actual spend by Edinburgh Council on support services on drug services?

- Answer** (2) The funding provided for drug and alcohol services by the Scottish Government is allocated in the first instance to NHS Lothian. This money, in turn, forms part of the budget delegated to the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board who prioritise its application. As such it combines with other funding streams to give an overall budget for drug and alcohol services. Because of how the Council's element of this information is held in the financial ledger, further analysis is required to extract the overall spend on drug and alcohol services over the 5 year period requested
- Question** (3) What funding comparisons are available for those countries with lower drug deaths than Scotland?
- Answer** (3) The Partnership do not hold this information. Scottish Government have indicated they might be able to provide some information in relation to rehabilitation investment and further information is being sought.

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