



Council Leader's Report

Adam McVey

EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

March 2021

Positive steps in our fight against COVID-19

As we move into spring, prospects are also brightening in our fight against COVID-19. Last month we [welcomed thousands of younger pupils back into our schools](#), along with older students completing practical work, supported by our fantastic teams of teaching staff across the city. In the next few weeks, we'll begin to see the phased return of all pupils, which I know will be great news for many families, and we'll be working extra hard to make sure this process goes smoothly and safely.

These developments follow the [Scottish Government's strategic framework for exiting lockdown](#), which offers some hope for a return to some sense of normality in the coming months. This optimism has been boosted by the exceptional [vaccination roll-out](#) – around a third of the Scottish population has already received their first jab – and significantly increased testing to track down and isolate any new cases.

Just this month, the [latest mass vaccination centre](#) opened at Edinburgh Park, offering nearly 500 appointments a day, and the number of walk-through testing centres in the city is continuing to increase with the launch of two new testing centres in the car parks of Ainslie Park Leisure Centre and the Jack Kane Sports Centre and Community Centre.

Of course, these are all reasons to be positive, but we mustn't let our guard down. By continuing to stick to the rules, staying at home and minimising interaction with other households, we can stop the spread of this virus in its tracks, working towards an end to restrictions and the reintroduction of all the activities, socialising and travel that we've all missed so much.

Helping businesses hard-hit by the pandemic

Through the [Discretionary Grant Fund](#) we continue to support those businesses most in need following the second lockdown and stricter restrictions. Since we launched it in early February, we've now distributed £2,000 grants to more than 450 businesses and I'm really pleased to confirm that there is even better news for businesses, with an additional £10 million allocated to Edinburgh for our Discretionary Fund pot.

We're finalising detailed proposals for how this will be distributed and hope to have these agreed soon so we can start a second application process and continue to help more businesses through these challenging times. I'm sure news of the extension to business rates relief will also have been extremely welcome.

To date, we've provided financial support to over 19,000 Edinburgh businesses, including 4,240 taxi drivers, with total funding in excess of £181.4 million. And, together with our partners, we're working hard to support city businesses to get back up and running sustainably and help Edinburgh recover and rebuild once we get past the current crisis.

Delivering a green, sustainable and people-friendly city

As we look to make a green recovery from the pandemic, providing safe, sustainable travel options will be critical. In the last month we've made great strides with several major projects defining the future of transport and mobility here in Edinburgh, starting with approval of the [City Mobility Plan](#). This ten-year plan will deliver a better-connected, net-zero carbon transport system and a healthier environment for our residents – and I'm delighted that we'll now be able to get to work on actions to achieve this.

During COVID, our [Spaces for People programme](#) has been helping people to travel sustainably, by walking wheeling and cycling safely around their community. We're now considering if some of the temporary measures are worth keeping longer term. We're [asking for your views about the measures](#) which improved safety at the school gates, gave more space for people and families, supported local business and provided spaces that parents were comfortable letting their kids cycle in. Please take this chance to have your say.

I know many people will have shared my excitement when they saw the stunning new concept designs for the transformation of George Street and First New Town. The fantastic [3D fly-through video](#) demonstrates in great detail just how welcoming this historic street could look once the project is delivered in 2025. If you've not seen the video, [have a look, find out more about the designs and let us know what you think](#).

All aboard for a revitalised Granton Station

We have a steadfast commitment to unlocking the potential of the waterfront at Granton as a thriving place to live, work and spend time in. Our landmark plans for the area took another big step forward yesterday (4 March) with the award of a £4.75 million contract to Kier Construction for the [revamp of the B-listed Granton Station](#).

This historic Edwardian building will be restored and transformed into a high-quality creative workspace, with the currently derelict land in front of it returned to use as a public square for community events and recreation. Work's due to get under way by early 2022.

This is a key milestone in our [£1.3 billion Granton Waterfront sustainable regeneration project](#) and I'm hugely looking forward to seeing it all take shape.

New planet-friendly school for Currie

It's always exciting when new school plans and images are made public but there's something really special about the [new Currie Community High School](#), which is set to become one of the most energy-efficient high schools in the whole of Scotland.

The campus will be the first Passivhaus-designed high school in the country, setting the standard for energy consumption across school estates. Passivhaus reduces the amount of energy needed for heating by up to 90%. It also lowers the total amount of energy used by around 70% and minimises carbon emissions.

These plans come hot on the heels of our partnership work with the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative to install [solar panels on the roof of Waverley Court](#). This is the sixth public building to be fitted with solar panels as part of the second phase of one of the largest community-owned renewable energy projects in the UK. As well as supplying green energy to Council buildings, any surplus profits made by the project will be reinvested locally through a Community Benefit Fund.

International Women's Day 2021

This month is Women's History Month and it's been inspiring to see the stories of our Capital's most prominent and impactful women being told. On Monday (8 March) we'll also be proudly flying the [International Women's Day](#) flag from the City Chambers. On this day every year the world comes together to celebrate women's social, economic, cultural and political achievements, raise awareness against bias and accelerate 'action for gender parity'.

To mark the occasion, our [Museums Service](#) has been profiling five pioneering women whose lives are reflected by our collections. This series forms part of their current [Auld Reekie Retold](#) project and will become an online exhibition on [Capital Collections](#). There's also a series of online events and lectures to mark the day and you can book your place now for the [An \(Almost\) A to Z of Modern Scottish Women Artists](#) (8 March) and [Scots Women who Chose to Challenge](#) (9 March) lectures.

It was fantastic to see the fifth Women in Business programme launched as the part of the Business Gateway Edinburgh's International Women's Day event this week. It focuses on growth and financial planning to help women in business build a sustainable and scalable business model, while also providing practical support in areas such as funding, productivity and leadership.

The feedback we've consistently received from participants who have completed our [six-week Women in Business programme](#) is that spending time and learning from other businesses is one of the highlights – I'd definitely encourage anyone who's interested to find out more.

Share your views on future Winter Festivals

Just over a year ago, I committed to a full conversation on what Edinburgh's Christmas and Hogmanay celebrations should look like. The events are a lynchpin of so many of our families' Christmases, while providing a significant boost to the local economy, creating jobs and attracting huge numbers of locals and visitors to support our city centre businesses each year. But they also present challenges in terms of their impact, and it's important we strike the right balance.

That's why following the end of the current contract, we're taking the opportunity to reflect on the events so we can make sure the Winter Festivals we stage truly reflect the wishes and aspirations of people who live and work in the Capital.

Our 12-week consultation on the future of Winter Festivals from 2021/22 is now under way and we've had more than 4,000 responses in the first week alone. The survey's being carried out by independent market research company [Progressive](#) and you can [take part on the Consultation Hub](#) or request a paper copy by calling the Council on 0131 200 2000.

Don't miss your chance to cast your vote on 6 May

With less than nine weeks to go until the Scottish Parliament election it's important to think about how you'll be voting and [making sure you're registered to vote](#).

On polling day there will be additional hygiene and distancing measures at all our polling places to keep voters and staff safe. Measures include a fresh pencil for each voter, protective screens for polling staff and limits to the number of voters in polling places at any given time. To reduce the prospect of queues, voters are being asked to consider a postal vote and to apply for one now.

You have a range of options for casting your ballot – in person, by post or by appointing someone you trust to vote in your place, known as a proxy. The deadline to register to vote is midnight on 19 April, to [apply for a postal vote](#) the deadline is 5pm on 6 April, while for a proxy vote the deadline is 5pm on 27 April.

Get involved

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