



Council Leader's Report

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• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

August 2021

Festival buzz in the air again

It's been brilliant to have our festivals back in the city this month, making Edinburgh feel like Edinburgh once again. From kids' shows to street acts, fine art to films, live music to plays – there's truly something for everyone to discover and enjoy.

It's been a genuine Team Edinburgh effort between the Council, the various festivals, Festivals Edinburgh, Scottish Government, Event Scotland and other stakeholders to bring the festivals back safely for summer 2021. My sincere thanks to all the teams and partner organisations who have worked together throughout the pandemic to make sure our Capital rightly returns as the world's Festival City.

While we recover the soul by attending live performances again, and enjoy more opportunities to meet and socialise with friends and family, we've got to keep in mind that the pandemic's far from over.

There's light at the end of the tunnel but only if we take care, [get both vaccination doses if eligible](#) and carry out [regular testing](#) will we be able to beat this together.

Afghans fleeing for their lives are welcome here

Nobody can fail to be shocked and appalled by the news coming out of Afghanistan and [as a city we stand ready to help](#) in whatever way we can.

Scotland's Capital has a long and proud history of welcoming people escaping desperate circumstances such as these. Our highly skilled team has forged a positive track record over the last five years, successfully welcoming, supporting and settling more than 500 people displaced by the Syrian civil war into our city.

We're in contact with both the UK Government and Scottish Government and are developing plans for how best we and our partners can offer support and housing to as many Afghans in need as possible.

We hope to be in a position to confirm the level of Edinburgh's involvement very soon. Meanwhile we continue to work at pace with the Home Office and our partners in the city to ensure support is in place for those fleeing for their lives as the situation in their homeland deteriorates.

Have your say on short term lets

Almost a third of all short term lets in Scotland are here in Edinburgh and this is putting real pressure on rents and house prices in the city, as well as taking badly-needed homes out of supply. It's also causing well-documented antisocial behaviour problems and our City Centre communities feeling 'hollowed out'.

We're delighted, then, that after our successful call for powers to deal with short term lets, legislation's now in place to allow us to make Edinburgh a short term let control area. Our ['Choices' consultation responses](#) showed overwhelming support for us to look at control areas in the Capital.

Please [have your say on the proposed 'whole of Edinburgh' control zone](#) through our forthcoming online consultation – we want as many people as possible to make their voices heard.

If, after listening to the views of residents and industry, we decide we should go ahead – and provided the Scottish Government approves our approach – many properties being let out on a short-term basis would automatically require 'change of use' planning permission in place.

Providing the best possible start in life

I'm delighted that we've been able to meet our commitment to providing 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare for all 3 to 4-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds here in Edinburgh. This is a great achievement and thanks must go to our Early Years teams who had the foresight to put detailed plans in place and started phasing in the offer from 2017.

The expansion has given us a great opportunity to be innovative and we're leading the way in Scotland with our exciting forest kindergartens with seven settings already up and running. We now also have 43 child minders supporting us in addition to our 99 local authority nurseries, over 100 private/voluntary organisations providing places and three new nurseries opening this session.

We've doubled our workforce and our leading Early Learning and Childcare Academy has allowed us to recruit and train staff giving them a clear career path.

This has been a real Team Edinburgh effort and, with over 10,500 children receiving the offer, we're making sure our future generations get the best possible start in life.

Moving forward with walking, wheeling and cycling

We remain committed to creating safe, accessible routes for travel around Edinburgh by foot, wheel or bike. In fact, during lockdown we saw just what an impact quieter streets can have, with a surge in people walking, wheeling and cycling. Through [Spaces for People](#) we wanted to support these ways of travelling while giving people room to physically distance.

Now, as restrictions are eased and traffic levels increase, lots of people are still benefiting from these changes, which provide protected spaces for pedestrians, wheelchair users and cyclists.

There are some areas where we feel the measures are no longer needed – and we've listened to public feedback and agreed to remove these. But we'll be looking to the future of many of the schemes in place under the [newly-titled Travelling Safely programme](#), and how we can improve upon them.

One of our flagship projects to significantly improve walking, wheeling and cycling facilities in the city centre, the [George Street and First New Town project](#), is also progressing, with the key elements for its design and operation agreed by Councillors. We were all wowed by the scheme's concept designs earlier this year and this latest decision takes us a step closer to realising our bold vision.

Reforming our public transport companies

It's crucial that we support people to make sustainable travel choices if we are to meet our net zero carbon goals, and public transport is key to this. We already have a fantastic offering in Edinburgh, with so many of us regularly relying on services from Lothian Buses and Edinburgh Trams.

As we look to the future of travel in Edinburgh, we want to make sure our Transport Arm's Length External Organisations (ALEOs) – Lothian Buses and Edinburgh Trams – are even more efficient, better integrated and as attractive a transport choice as possible. By reforming their management, we'll be able to achieve this, while better supporting the companies' recovery from the pandemic too.

We know how much the bus and tram services are valued by local people, as demonstrated by consistently high customer satisfaction ratings, and I want to reassure everyone that if the proposals are approved at next month's Council meeting, there won't be any changes to the identities of these cherished transport companies. All you would notice is better integration of tickets and routes, more seamless journeys and improved customer service – something we can all get on board with. It may also help us to deliver a new bike hire scheme, which we're aiming to do as soon as possible.

Backing sustainable growth as Edinburgh recovers

With the first phase of the St James Quarter now open, seeing many new retailers attracted to the city and enjoying a successful first few months of trading, we'll see another major boost for the city centre when the Johnnie Walker Experience opens its doors next month.

It's exciting to see these new attractions take root after years of planning, construction and development. They're already breathing new life into the area and helping drive our collective recovery as a Capital.

This month we've also opened our wider public consultation for the [Edinburgh Economic Strategy](#), putting the city centre at the heart of our recovery plan, alongside a range of wider priorities, including sustainable growth. In line with our [Business Plan for Edinburgh](#), we want to build a city where everyone can thrive with a strategy focused on improving wellbeing, boosting sustainability and tackling poverty and inequality.

I urge everyone with an interest to [visit our Consultation Hub](#). You can have your say until 22 October and the responses will feed into our final draft documents to be considered by committee in November.

Creating a cultural centre for Granton Waterfront

We're making fantastic progress in bringing the historic Granton Station back to life as the focal point and cultural centre of our £1.3bn regeneration of the whole Granton Waterfront area.

The first spades went into the ground to [transform this iconic piece of Edwardian architecture](#) into a creative and cultural hub in June and, just last week, we announced [we're leasing the building to leading arts and social enterprise charity Wasps](#), who are set to move into the former station next year.

The charity will support around 40 jobs, as well as helping around 100 people each year with creative business development opportunities. They'll deliver a heritage programme for local people and railway enthusiasts on the location's unique history, with exhibition space to showcase local talent. The new hub will also host workshops and a series of outdoor and online events for locals, which are sure to be a real draw for thousands of visitors to the area.

This week we've also [unveiled the name members of the public chose for the new square](#) in front of the former station – Granton Station Square. Thanks to everyone who took the time to vote.

Transforming Wester Hailes through regeneration

The shared vision we've developed with the local community for the Wester Hailes area took a major step forward with the [appointment of a team of consultants](#) to develop a masterplan for the area.

This is a massively important project that will offer real opportunities for people in Wester Hailes. The masterplan includes improvements to existing homes as well as desperately needed new affordable housing, together with employment opportunities and facilities to help local businesses and entrepreneurs to prosper.

It builds on a number of 'early action' projects that are already under way, such as improvements to existing Council homes and estates, the Dumbryden Gardens new-build housing development, early design work for the replacement of the local high school, as well as improvement work at Westside Plaza.

We look forward to actively engaging with people in Wester Hailes and nearby communities throughout the masterplan's development so that these improvements benefit everyone.

Making the grade

Finally, a huge well done to all our young people who received their results from the Scottish Qualifications Authority this month. Even though this was the second year without traditional exams, there's no doubting the enormous amount of work they put in for the assessments. It's been a sterling effort by our teachers, too, in organising the self-assessments in this most challenging of years.

I want to wish all our school leavers the best for the future in whatever path they follow – they all have so many diverse strengths and interests and every learner's journey is different. This diversity is reflected through the city's Edinburgh Guarantee, [which marked its 10th anniversary earlier this year](#), and the Scottish Government's Young Person's Guarantee (YPG).

Through these employability commitments we want to make sure no one is left behind and has a positive destination, whether that be through further education, training or into employment. Through the YPG funding we're supporting employers to create up to 120 new jobs and apprenticeships and are offering 80 paid work placements in the Council and across other public and third sector organisations.

Good luck to those pupils who are continuing with their studies this year, from the four and five-year-olds starting school for the very first time to those at the close of their school careers. With most Covid restrictions now lifted, we can look forward with hope for an academic year that sees a return to some sense of normality in our schools.

Get involved

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