



Council Leader's Report

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EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Sept 2021

Vaccination, Vaccination, Vaccination

It's almost exactly 18 months since we went into the first full lockdown of the pandemic and, thankfully, things are in a far better place now than they were back then.

There's no room for complacency, though, and there's still much we all need to do to keep the city on track. Cases remain high in Edinburgh and although it's good news that the infection rate seems to be slowing now, we've got to stay vigilant.

As well as continuing to follow the safety and hygiene guidance, getting vaccinated is the surest way to keep ourselves and our communities protected from this awful virus and I'm delighted that 78% of our citizens are now double-dosed.

That does mean, though, that there are still many thousands of local people unvaccinated, including [12-15-year-olds who are newly eligible](#), so I'd urge everyone who still needs their first or second dose to [pop along to one of the many drop-in clinics](#) around the city and help us collectively tackle the spread.

Welcoming Afghan refugees to our city

Edinburgh has a long and proud history of offering a safe refuge and positive new start for those fleeing war and turmoil in their home countries. In the past few weeks, our experienced Council team has worked hand in hand with partner agencies across the city to welcome a group of Afghan people escaping the increasingly desperate situation in their homeland.

I'm delighted to say the group, who are currently in hotel accommodation, have been settling in well and are receiving a full range of practical and pastoral support to help them adjust to their new circumstances.

Huge thanks to everyone involved in this process, from across the Council, Police Scotland, NHS Lothian, the DWP, Lothian Buses, COSLA and, of course, third sector organisations including Edinburgh Clothing Store, Re-Act, Edinburgh City Mission and Scottish Faith Action for Refugees. And thanks to people across the City who have got in touch to offer help.

This has been a genuine Team Edinburgh effort and one which will continue in the weeks and months ahead.

Co-creating a healthy, green, sustainable future for Edinburgh

[Scotland's Climate Week](#) is currently under way and this year, in the run up to COP26, it showcases climate action taking place across the country. Since [declaring a climate emergency](#) and setting our target of a net zero Edinburgh by 2030 two years ago, we've played a leading role in creating a healthy, green, clean, and sustainable future for the city.

Most recently, we've recognised the important role food growing plays in responding to climate change and have become a [signatory to the International Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration](#). The Declaration highlights the vital role food plays in meeting our net zero targets, as well as helping to reduce poverty, inequality and poor health.

We also want Edinburgh to sign up to [Scotland's Climate Assembly's Civic Charter](#) and will be asking councillors to approve this on 23 September. The Charter provides a mandate from citizens to the Scottish Government to meet our climate obligations.

Our communities, businesses and residents already have a strong record of climate action and, as we work towards net zero, I know the city will work together to deliver change at the speed and scale needed for a greener future for us all.

Last weekend to share your views on LEZ proposals

One way we're working to create a healthier environment right here in Edinburgh is through the [introduction of a Low Emission Zone \(LEZ\)](#), which will promote cleaner air, improve health and create more pleasant surroundings.

Air pollution is harmful to us all, but particularly to the youngest, oldest and most vulnerable members of society. By limiting the most polluting vehicles in the city centre, we expect to lower traffic-related emissions there by about 55% with a positive knock-on impact on air quality across the city.

A great deal of analysis and modelling has gone into the development of our LEZ, as well as consideration for the people who live and work here. That's why our proposals include a two-year grace period after the LEZ is introduced in spring 2022 to help people prepare and why we'll introduce exemptions for blue badge holders and other essential vehicles to make sure they can still serve the city.

We're one of four Scottish cities collaborating with the Scottish Government to introduce an LEZ and we want to bring the people of Edinburgh along with us as we make these changes.

We want to know what you think of the proposals, so please [take part in the consultation](#) before it closes on 20 September.

Recovery momentum continues

Over the summer months we've seen businesses starting to recover. In the heart of the city, the new St James Quarter is fast becoming an established shopping and dining destination, with more retailers and eateries opening their doors. This, together with the newly-opened Johnnie Walker Princes Street and plans for other major units on Princes Street, shows there's real investor confidence in our vibrant Capital.

As a Council, we continue to support businesses – financially and practically – and this month additional money is being distributed through the Discretionary Grant Fund to trade associations as well as those suffering a continuing impact on their earnings.

And with Covid 19 cases still high, [we're helping Edinburgh's hospitality sector](#) to keep making the most of outdoor spaces safely by extending the measures we introduced in March for another month (to 31 October). Of course, this has to be balanced with the needs of local residents, so we're asking businesses to apply for the appropriate permission for any temporary structures beyond that date.

Taking pride in our beautiful city

With many Covid restrictions now lifted, it's been fantastic seeing more people out and about enjoying our beautiful city. This does, however, put a lot more pressure on our hard-working waste and cleansing teams.

To help tackle this we've installed 30 extra bins at 'hotspot' areas throughout the city, including dedicated BBQ bins in busy parks and our new communal bin hubs (being installed following our [communal bin review](#)) are making disposing of residential waste a lot easier. We hope they'll boost our recycling rates, too.

Weeds have become an issue across parts of Edinburgh, so we've allocated more resources to deal with this. If you spot an area that needs attention, please contact us via the [Council's website](#) or on Twitter via [Edinhelp](#). We're really grateful to everyone who's taken the opportunity to weed outside their homes while trimming their hedges.

I want to pay tribute to our dedicated teams for continuing to deliver quality services while still experiencing Covid-related staff shortages. Their commitment through the pandemic has been unyielding and I would urge you to support them as they go about their work.

Curtain up at our cultural venues

We were thrilled to reopen the doors at our iconic [Usher Hall](#), [Assembly Rooms](#) and [Museum of Edinburgh](#) at the end of August. It's brilliant to see such significant cultural venues back open, both for public wellbeing and to support the recovery of our cultural infrastructure and economy.

Ten thousand people have already been through the Usher Hall's grand doors to enjoy performances by Passenger, The Specials and Elbow, plus Teenage Fanclub at the Assembly Rooms.

Now is also a great time to [rediscover the historic Museum of Edinburgh on the Royal Mile](#), which has welcomed an average of 140 visitors each day since it reopened. There's plenty to see at this quirky museum – if you haven't been before, or recently, come and discover Edinburgh's fascinating past among the various exhibits from both the Old and New Towns.

It has been a massive effort from our venues' teams to deliver operational and customer services with Covid-19 measures in place and I'd like to thank them for their continued dedication and hard work.

Get involved

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