



Council Leader's Report

Adam McVey



December 2021

Let's enjoy a safe Christmas

The latest news about the increasingly rapid spread of the new Omicron variant of Covid is of course worrying and, as the First Minister confirmed in her update earlier today, it's more important than ever that we step up our efforts to limit its impact. We must take action now to protect ourselves and those around us and reduce the risk of further restrictions being imposed over Christmas.

If we continue to follow the guidance – wearing face coverings indoors, practicing good hand and surface hygiene, testing regularly and, vitally, getting both jags and, if eligible, the booster – we can hopefully return to some sense of normality over the festive season while protecting one another from infection. We've come so far over the last year and a half, there's no reason to stop now, so let's pull together to slow the virus's spread.

I know people are rightly angry about the headlines of rules being broken by those in the UK Government, but please remember this isn't about them. It's about keeping our city safe, you safe, your family safe and our NHS protected.

Once again, I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to the many, many people, from all our Council staff to NHS workers, retailers and other businesses to transport providers, and countless others who've helped protect us and kept our services running throughout the year.

... and a green one too

More of us than ever before are looking to make sustainable changes in our daily lives to help protect our planet. And, with four out of five people in Edinburgh agreeing that we have a responsibility to cut down on waste this Christmas, our [new Green Christmas campaign](#) highlights some of the steps we can all take to buy more responsibly and avoid waste where possible over the festive season.

There is lots of helpful information and tips available on our website, including details on recycling and Christmas tree uplifts, plastic free and second-hand shops across the city and inspiration on how to buy less, choose well and make things last.

It's hugely important that Edinburgh does all it can to play its part in tackling the climate emergency, and I'm pleased the city's [2030 Climate Strategy](#) was approved by Councillors last month. It sets out a greener, fairer, climate ready future for the city and is supported by an implementation plan which outlines the deliverables, timescales, milestones and resources needed to achieve the city's ambitious climate goals, along with clear measures of outcomes and impact.

Communal bins, communal benefit

I was pleased also to see Zero Waste Scotland backing the roll-out of our new and improved communal bin hubs this week [with a funding announcement of £7.7m](#) from the Scottish Government's Recycling Improvement Fund.

Such significant national investment – with almost 60% of the entire national allocation coming to Edinburgh – demonstrates clear support for our efforts to improve the sustainability and effectiveness our waste service for all residents.

With all the different waste bins grouped together, the hubs are far more convenient and accessible. They have increased capacity and the service will be more reliable and frequent, reducing overflowing bins and street clutter.

If you live in a shared property and don't currently use our kerbside service, around 130,000 of you will see the new hubs appearing shortly.

We'll also be using the funding to invest in new bin sensors and five new electric vehicles for our fleet, helping us towards Edinburgh's net zero ambitions and improving our air quality.

A sustainable future for our Winter Festivals

When we embarked on a citywide conversation on the future of Edinburgh's Winter Festivals earlier this year, we had a very open mind on what the format of these events could be in future years.

We had an [excellent response to the consultation](#), and it was encouraging that so many of our residents and businesses want to see Christmas and Hogmanay celebrations continue in the years ahead – while also providing us with a valuable insight into what exactly people and businesses would like to see changed.

I know there are lots of differing views on the hosting of major events, but it has been encouraging to see this level of input from people of all ages and tastes – and from right across the city. Whilst some differences of opinion can't be reconciled, this input helps us to reflect our residents' aspirations for these celebrations in future while dealing with concerns raised from previous years.

Following the consultation, Councillors unanimously agreed to run a one-year pilot for winter 2022/23 – helping us to ensure that our focus remains firmly on our residents and local businesses. If we get it right for them first and foremost, I’m sure these events will be enjoyed for many more years to come.

The Story Never Ends...

Following the [success of our first Forever Edinburgh campaign](#) in the summer, the winter leg is now well underway, continuing to highlight our city from a different perspective and showcasing its many qualities.

Over the past few weeks we’ve become acquainted with local pooch Hamish who through a [new ‘dogs-eye view’ video](#) has shown us that Edinburgh is every bit as welcoming and accessible for dog lovers. The city is ranked as the UK’s most dog-friendly destination and with more people becoming dog owners during the pandemic and planning to travel with their pets, it’s a great opportunity to promote the city in a novel way.

Meanwhile, the campaign is enjoying widespread UK media interest (close to 200 articles in less than a week) thanks to its collaboration with one of our favourite authors, Ian Rankin OBE. [A new competition launched this week](#) offers up the chance to walk in the footsteps of some of the world’s best loved writers on a tour of Edinburgh’s literary sites accompanied by the Rebus’ creator.

Of course, Edinburgh was UNESCO’s first City of Literature and it’s not surprising the capital has provided the inspiration to so many writers down the centuries.

Not sitting still on fundraising appeal

We’re giving our full support to the fundraising efforts taking place to raise funds for a statue in tribute to the life and work of pioneering Edinburgh doctor Elsie Inglis.

Elsie was a woman of real character, who inspired others with her determination and pioneering work during the most challenging times. It’s entirely fitting, then, that we should have a lasting tribute to her legacy on the streets of the Capital.

Originally launched in 2017, the establishment of a Working Group chaired by the Lord Provost has led to renewed focus and an exciting new stage of the fundraising campaign. Some of the activities already planned for 2022 include the Girlguiding sponsored ‘Sit Still’ in the Meadows and a series of afternoon teas to be held in the City Chambers and the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh.

The Group has recently [launched a dedicated website](#) where you can learn more about the life and times of Elsie Inglis as well as information on how to get involved and donate to this most worthwhile cause.

Good luck for 2022

This time last year, we were waiting expectantly for the roll-out of the vaccine programme, which gave us all such a welcome lift during 2021. Now, with the emergence of Omicron variant, we find ourselves at a crossroads once more but, thankfully, with a great deal more confidence in our ability to fight this virus.

As a city, we’ve continued to show real grit, community spirit and resilience through everything the pandemic has thrown at us – and I have no doubt that we’ll continue this into the new year.

For our part, as a Council, we’ll be pressing on with our core priorities to bring about lasting, positive change for Edinburgh – tackling climate change and poverty, building thousands of new affordable homes, investing in zero-carbon transport choices, building new schools to give our children the best possible start in life and much, much more. All while, of course, focusing on getting the basics right for the people who call Edinburgh home.

I wish you all a happy and restful festive period and all the very best for 2022.

Get involved

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